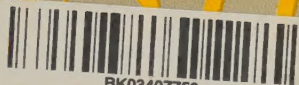


ENGLISH DOMESTIC NEEDLEWORK



Therle Hughes

WITH 52 PLATES — 4 IN FULL COLOUR

FOR PERSONAL ASSOCIATIONS, FOR CRAFTSMANSHIP, or for the individuality of their design, old embroideries possess an attraction for many besides the collector aware of a rising market. Great-grandmother's childhood sampler, the pastoral scene on the Sheraton polescreen, a cavalier's gorgeous glove, a patchwork cot-cover — the family relic in the attic trunk may well deserve new scrutiny and appraisal.

This book is intended to present the basic facts that will help in giving each specimen its place in the long and fascinating history of domestic embroideries. The subjects of its chapters range from the splendours of embroidery in metal threads to the exquisite delicacy of whitework, from bed hangings and ornamental pillows to bead purses and purled book covers. Pictorial embroideries alone reach from the thirteenth century *opus Anglicanum* to the nineteenth century Berlin wool cross stitch; furniture embroideries from Tudor table 'carpets' through a wealth of chair cover, screens, cabinets; costume embroidery from petticoats and 'night caps' to pockets and stomachers.

Techniques and stitches are explained, such as the intentions and effects of quilting, for example, or patchwork, or tent stitch, the author seeking always to appreciate the purpose behind the embroiderer's choice of material and method. She writes from long and absorbed study of the social life and conditions that prompted the work, as well as with a needlewoman's love of embroidery.

Her book is of particular service to a wider public, however, because it is written for those who look at embroideries rather than those who make them. They will enjoy it the more through understanding the patterns and materials, the novelties and fashions that influenced men, women and children to create the fragile, centuries-defying embroideries that delight, amuse, inspire us today.

With 4 colour plates and 48 black and white plates

~~PROPERTY OF~~
~~EMBROIDERERS' GUILD OF VICTORIA~~

Lorena Beck
Brighton 1969

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ZB

~~PROPERTY OF~~
~~EMBROIDERERS' GUILD OF VICTORIA.~~

ENGLISH DOMESTIC NEEDLEWORK

1660-1860

By G. Bernard Hughes:

ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH EARTHENWARE 1660-1860
LIVING CRAFTS

By Therle Hughes:

OLD ENGLISH FURNITURE
SMALL DECORATIVE ANTIQUES

By Bernard and Therle Hughes:

ENGLISH PORCELAIN AND BONE CHINA
THE COLLECTOR'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ENGLISH CERAMICS
SMALL ANTIQUE FURNITURE
ENGLISH GLASS FOR THE COLLECTOR, 1660-1860



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A. Detail from early Georgian chair upholstery, the figure of Britannia, in red heeled shoes, delicately worked in tent stitch and framed by rich flowery scrolls in bolder cross stitch. Dark indigo was an effective background to the massive patterns of bright colours then widely popular.

THERLE HUGHES

ENGLISH DOMESTIC NEEDLEWORK

1660 — 1860



ABBAY FINE ARTS
LONDON

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146 - 152, HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON, N. 7

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book might well be dedicated "To the enjoyment of old embroidery." It is for those who find embroideries lovely or exciting or amusing to look at, or use, or wear, who appreciate the limitless subtleties of colour and texture and the range of subject and purpose. It is for those who value a craft that can find use and service in every decorative device, and gaiety or shrewd nonsense or gracious, sophisticated beauty in every working requirement of the needle-woman.

The practising experts in this most civilised of crafts have their own library. These pages, accumulated over many years of wholly enjoyable and appreciative investigation, are for those who want, primarily, to *look at* old embroideries rather than to appraise their stitchcraft or catalogue their materials. They are for those who value the results and only secondarily question the methods—even perhaps for some who still consider it becoming to scorn any knowledge of methods.

This attitude is almost outmoded now, and many men are no longer content to let women alone experience the delight of creative stitchery, yet many people, it seems, are still deprived of much pleasure in old embroideries because daunted by a technical jargon that really consists of little more than names of stitches and fabrics. Upon analysis the stitches prove to be few enough and the exact nature of the materials seldom very important. Personal experience in the craft, as in any craft, is enlightening and enriching but may come later. For the inexperienced collector today, as for the people who once used the embroideries here under review, there is limitless enjoyment to eye and finger.

Some readers may possess a few pieces of old home embroidery and wish to visualise their setting in time and place

and custom; some may want to start a collection. For this reason it has seemed best to distinguish first between the main styles of embroidery and then to re-group these according to their general purpose. As a result some duplication is unavoidable, but it becomes easy, I hope, to *use* the book.

As regards the basic techniques or stitches of the craft, these are most easily understood from the diagrams on page 25. It will be appreciated that throughout the period wools were comparatively cheap to work with, silks expensive but decreasing in relative price, metal threads most costly of all. For the home embroiderer especially this governed the uses found for each, and even more conspicuously perhaps the styles of the stitchery. Ecclesiastical and professional work, with their different values, are largely outside the scope of this volume, although inevitably I have considered and included very many borderline specimens—and probably in many more cases I have insulted a home embroiderer by denying the possibility of individual amateur skill to work of such magnitude and perfection.

Stitches entirely covering the ground made it possible to use inexpensive fabrics but demanded great quantities of the embroidery wool or silk—most conspicuously when, as in tent stitch, each stitch is linked to the next at the back of the work by a longer stroke than appears on the front, ensuring results of such strength and durability that probably today we have an exaggerated idea of its popularity in its time. In contrast, where economy of embroidery silk or metal thread was essential, the needlewoman used delicate line and speckle stitchery or made a brave show on the surface of the fabric with laid and couched work, held down by inferior threads, and such stitches as braid and chain that waste a minimum of length on the back. This consideration for her materials has always affected the home needlewoman only secondarily to her consideration of the purpose she seeks to achieve, the need she is thus meeting with practical common sense transformed by elegance or charm.

Her final choice among stitches, of course, must often be decided by the fabric, and here Britain has had the advantage of long contact with Europe's flax in loose weaves suitable for drawn and cut embroidery and other counted

INTRODUCTION

thread work, the rich silks of the Levant and the Orient for smooth, sophisticated brilliancies of sun-drenched colours, and the soft-fibred cottons of India offering muslins and nets to prompt the most restrained shadow effects.

Such considerations in themselves suggest themes that may be followed up by a collector. Each chapter of this book may lead to further ideas. Common sense will guide the collector as to how far considerations of price may permit the acquisition of imperfect work, but only prolonged examination of authenticated specimens in museum and well-documented collection will ensure avoidance of deliberate fakes, of old work mended and remounted, of unrelated embroidery scraps put together to make an impossible, but all-too-saleable, whole.

Further suggestions for collecting are endless. Miniature embroideries for antique dolls are quite unreasonably enticing. Victorian embroideries are abundantly available and far more varied and attractive than might appear at first glance. It is hard to imagine a more exquisite collection, or one more rich in opportunities for acquiring small, inexpensive trifles, than a group of embroidered flowers, the "artless" Tudor, Stuart and Georgian declarations of affection for old familiar friends that were part and parcel of the needlewoman's duties in every corner of her home. If there is here some deterioration in Victorian flower pieces, this may be taken as indication that the needlewoman was at last losing touch with her garden, and it needed a William Morris to lead her back—back to the May-morning freshness of a Hilliard miniature, back to Chaucer's gallant young squire

*Embrouded was he, as it were a mede,
Al ful of freshe floures, whyte and rede,*

back to the earliest Egyptian embroiderer representing the sun in the petals of the lotus.

Chapter One

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GENERAL TRENDS

NEOLITHIC women in England could spin and sew; weaving and dyeing were well established before the arrival of the Romans, and Boadicea herself was taken prisoner in a tartan dress and a fur-lined mantle of embroidered skins. Embroidery in England from Saxon times to the 19th century presents a magnificent panorama. Through a thousand years of changing fashions in fabrics and their associated stitches, it was distinguished by deft handling of colour and design, by masterly technique, and essential purposefulness.

Embroidery was first and foremost a useful craft. It was required for joining the early narrow widths of fabric and for reinforcing garments against the rub of wear. It provided the quilted padding needed under armour, and the distinctive "coats of arms", banners and horse trappings that had to accompany it. It served magnificently for visual teaching in the church. Thus it acquired a meaningful beauty to which each generation of embroiderers added their own blendings of colour and interpretation of design, as instinctive as their eyes' appreciation of lovely fabrics and their fingers' urge to work them.

Even by the 9th century embroidery in Britain was becoming renowned. In 833 Wiklaf king of Mercia was but following an accepted custom when he gave to the abbey of Croyland his cloak embroidered with the battle of Troy. King Harold's banner at the battle of Hastings was embroidered in gold and rich with jewels, and William of Poitiers, chaplain to William the Conqueror, records that the splendid embroidery of the Saxon nobles vastly impressed the Normans. Beowulf describes the hall of the

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GENERAL TRENDS

Saxon earl as hung with gold embroideries; and it is generally acknowledged that the fascinating 11th-century embroidery known as the Bayeux "tapestry" is a naïvely childish design compared with work found in contemporaneous tombs.

By the 13th century English ecclesiastical embroidery—*opus Anglicanum*—like the associated work of the illuminator, was unrivalled in Europe, although it deteriorated sadly in design and workmanship long years before the Reformation. The quantity of this pre-Reformation church embroidery may be gauged from the fact that Lincoln, for instance, had over six hundred vestments worked with embroidery, jewellery and gold.

Ecclesiastical embroidery is outside the scope of this survey, but it is interesting to note in passing the techniques employed, for they are worlds away from the earliest domestic embroideries remaining today. Copes and other vestments went through recognisable phases, their sacred themes set in circles or patterns of quatrefoils, or enriched with Gothic arcading or vine stem tracery. The grounds offer fascinating studies of couched work and the unreal, representational design of the figures themselves finds masterly expression in the exquisite split stitch that follows each curve of brow and nostril, spirals each cheek and intense, shadowy eye, and streaks hair and beard in green and yellow, perhaps, or blue and white.

At the same time, from before the Conquest and onwards, embroidery figured considerably on the dress of both men and women. The Domesday record mentions two hides of land held by a damsel Alunid on condition that she taught embroidery to the daughter of Earl Godric, as noted by F. and H. Marshall. When the returning Crusaders brought new ideas of luxury their homes, too, shared more considerably in the rich beauty of embroidered fabrics. Rooms might be hung with embroidered salles, for example, such as Edward the Black Prince bequeathed, embroidered with mermen and bordered with a design in red and black of swans and ladies' heads and ostrich feathers. Bed hangings, too, in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries might be embroidered with every kind of Scriptural subject, and devices

of animals and flowers in home-dyed wools or soft untwisted silks. To these opportunities for the embroiderer must be added the strict heraldic work more especially of the 14th century, on dress, horse trappings and house furnishings.

Some medieval embroidery was worked by professionals. The Broderers' Company was established in 1430, possibly amalgamating with the older Tapissers, and Broderers' Hall built in Cutter Lane in 1515, although it received its charter and coat of arms from Elizabeth I. Head-bands remain such as were worn by guild officials bearing the Company's emblem of the Holy Dove and the English needlewoman's favourite roses and strawberries. A sumptuary law, typical of many, forbade the wearing of embroidered garments to those with less than £200 a year, but immense extravagance continued. Young Richard II (1377-99) had a coat priced at 30,000 marks, and in 1422 a law was passed to control the quality of professional work and protect embroiderers from the shoddy stuff sold at country fairs.

Something of this flashing splendour lingered through the 16th century, witnessed for example in the ceremonial embroideries of what were justifiably renowned as Livery Companies. To cite but one example, the funeral pall of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers was made in about 1500, of gold Florentine velvet brocade and crimson silk, with the embroidered arms of the Company supported by mermaids. But it is significant that early pattern books—a number remain from the 16th century—are offered specifically for the pleasure and instruction of ladies and gentlewomen.

From these later Tudor days, from the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and more especially Elizabeth I, domestic embroidery remains to suggest something of its importance through that great century of brilliant, uninhibited colour, vigorous, intense pattern and imaginative ornament. Continental influence was extremely important, and Italy especially tended to dominate England and France alike, not only by the genius of her craftsmen but by her rich trade in the Mediterranean and Adriatic. But amateur embroideries, it appears, tended to hold somewhat aloof

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GENERAL TRENDS

from Italian example. Similarly Spanish fashions came from the Spanish-dominated Netherlands and were fostered by supporters of Henry's queen Katherine of Aragon, who had married Arthur Prince of Wales in 1501, and of her daughter Mary I, but in embroidery a native love of irregular flower forms and naturalistic colour tended to override the demands of monochrome formalities.

Wall hangings and beds, table carpets, cushions, clothing, even small details of purse and book cover received splendid adornment. It is difficult to form a full picture of the embroiderer's role in the mid-16th century but occasional details remain. Mary I as a young woman allowed her sewer of the chamber 7½*d.* a day and an attendant, the same as a master cook, but called upon her father's embroiderers, William Ilgrave and others, for patterns and stitchery on many of the cushion covers and articles of dress that she gave as presents. Wages at this period give little enough indication of status, however: Mary with a household staff of 304 had a yearly wage bill of only £741.

When the Coopers' Company ordered a new "hearse cloth" in 1563 they paid over £30 for the materials, and had to find 9*s.* for candles and 4*s.* 4*d.* for the embroiderers' bedding throughout the seven months that they laboured upon it, for a total wage of £24 10*s.* 4*d.* This was a highly skilled work involving a wide range of silk and velvet fabrics, their linings, fringes, gold and silver embroideries and pearls. (Plain sewing, one suspects, was miserably paid. In 1605 the Star Chamber bought 156 yards of damask and diaper for table cloths, towels, napkins and the like, ranging in price from 7*s.* 6*d.* to 1*s.* a yard, but "for making said table cloths and napkins" the outlay was 6*s.* 8*d.*)¹

Meanwhile the increasing wealth and sense of settled prosperity among landed and merchant families, the imports of silks and metal threads, the home manufacture of good steel needles and improvements in linen weaving and thread spinning all fostered home embroidery. Such details as embroidered book covers remain from Henry VIII's reign, but a far wider range of domestic embroideries from that of Elizabeth I, hangings and table carpets and many small

¹ *The Star Chamber Accounts*, A. Simon.

details of dress that testify to the embroiderer's love of filling every part of the material with pattern like an illuminated manuscript; a vivid expression of the same mood that prompted the gorgeous artificial dress, the literary conceits and the penetratingly naturalistic if somewhat rigid approach to flowers and gardens.

By then tent stitch was being used on embroidered furnishings to achieve tapestry effects. This stitch, rare in earlier work, consists of making a single diagonal stitch over each junction of warp and weft thread in the linen ground. Properly worked this means that a large proportion of the embroidery silk or crewel is on the wrong side of the material, adding greatly to its strength (see page 25).

The rambling draughty Elizabethan house called for a plentiful supply of hangings for warmth and some degree of privacy just as its hard, straight seat furniture called for innumerable cushions. Inventories of the period lay equal stress on woven decoration such as "chaungeable silk damasks" and embroidery such as "needleworke cushions of the grocers' [company's] arms", to quote from the 1590 inventory of Sir Thomas Ramsey, former Lord Mayor of London. There is constant reference at this period to Turkey work, in wool or linen thread, for cushions and the "carpets" laid on tables and shelves, but much of this would be professional work, knotted and cut in imitation of the evantine but given wholly English patternings.

Inventories and wills are tiresomely vague unless the testator is a woman, but enough remains to suggest that the better-off Elizabethan household usually owned at least a few pieces of furniture embroidery associated especially with the beds that might be found in every room of the house. Shop inventories are interesting. A Morpeth merchant in 1582 listed a wealth of coloured fabrics and also red, blue and black thread, fringes, silk points, various laces. A Newcastle merchant added seaming silk (£1 6s. 0d. a lb.) and sewing crewels (3s. 4d. a lb.), skein thread (2s. a lb.), crewel fringes (5s. 4d. a lb.), and piping thread (3s. 4d. a lb.). Hangings and table carpets, cushions and pillow cases remain from Elizabethan days, and the more durable items of dress.

As regards the embroidery of Elizabethan clothing, the

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queen herself had a love of immensely lavish finery, and there are records of many gifts of embroidery—women's smocks or chemises embroidered in blackwork and drawn thread work, and doublets "embroidered all over with gold, silver and silk of divers colours". A number of men's night caps and women's coifs and forehead cloths are still in existence, richly embroidered for wearing informally by day (Raleigh wore one to his execution under his hat). Hard high hats might bear their owners' arms in padded embroidery. Shoes were frequently embroidered, and embroidered gloves became widely fashionable in later Elizabethan days. Often gloves, doublets and book covers were scented, and the general need for rich perfumes through the centuries under review also resulted in the production of many embroidered bags for sweet herbs and spices. Other embroidered bags were intended to protect still more richly embroidered book covers, and embroidered purses were largely used for New Year gifts of money and jewels to people in high places.

The inventory of Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, made in 1614, gives details of no fewer than seventeen "sweet bags", such as one valued at fifty shillings "embrodered with highe embosted mosse worke having two sea nymphes upon dolphins and other figures of fowles, edged about with lace of silver and gold, lined with carnation", and others with "knottes of silver Oes with burning hartes", or "golde twiste roses and marigolds".

This inventory is a mine of information regarding contemporary embroidery on dress and furnishings, at a time when extremes of fashion prompted James I to forbid the servant girl "tiffany, velvet; lawns of white wires on the head, or about the kerchief, koyfe, crest cloth, but only linen; no farthingale, the ruff restricted to four yards in length before the gathering or setting of it".

This early Stuart dress continued many Elizabethan trends. Black and brightly coloured floral embroidery remained on caps and tunics, although weaving improvements somewhat lessened the need for superficial decoration. "A new Taffata wastecote embrodered with the runninge worke of silver with birds and flies in coulours upon white" was

priced in the Northampton inventory at £3, and this also listed Holland shirts "with an open lace at 30s. a piece"; velvet gowns; cloaks, especially of black velvet "raced about with flowers"; several pairs of trunk hose, their "panes" or panels embroidered to match. A girdle and hanger for dagger or small sword was embroidered and "powdred with pearle", and one entry records the embroidered slips and borders from a cloak cut out "to imbroder some furniture for the howse withall".

Quilting became important among dress and furnishing embroideries at this period, Charles I specifying quilts of China embroidered with gold among the imports permitted to the East India Company in 1631. It is hard to exaggerate the influence of Oriental embroidery on subsequent English work, despite its long prohibition in the 18th century.

Another source of foreign ideas in early Stuart England was the tapestry establishment at Mortlake. This was a craft worked by foreigners to foreign designs and was soon moribund, but undoubtedly the early tent-stitch needlework pictures were influenced by such efforts. These smaller panels of tent stitch are the earliest remaining "pictures" in needlework with no more important purpose. They are altogether different in design and treatment from professional pictorial embroideries, if Edmund Harrison's famous group at the Victoria and Albert Museum is to be regarded as typical of the latter. Professionals at this time were probably engaged mainly on major furnishings such as beds and the innumerable uniforms of a century that could devise even a suitable outfit for William Hester, rat catcher to William and Mary, of "crimson cloth lyned with blew serge and guarded with blew velvett Embroidered with their Maties W R M R and Crownes on back and chest and six Rattes Eateing a Wheat-sheave on the left shoulder".

Samplers remain from this period, expressing the general tendency for Stuart embroidery to offer laboured copies of Elizabethan motifs, reduced to an all-over sameness reminiscent of the carved strapwork on chest and buffet. It is easy to give undue emphasis to the brief 17th-century revolt against such monotony, and against the very essentials of embroidery—the craze for raised embroidery, now known

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as stump work and assiduously collected and reproduced. This appeared in pictures and on small pieces of dressing table furniture, worked by girls who had successfully completed less ambitious samplers but all too often lacked any idea of grace or style in their naïve designs, largely of a limited range of historical and Scriptural scenes, the central figures worked separately and applied.

The attention given to such minor work suggests that already woven fabrics were rivalling home embroideries. The later 17th century, however, with its tremendous advances in house building and furnishing, furthered by the needs of those involved in London's great fire of 1666, saw a new interest in comfort and beauty in the medium-wealthy home where the lady of the house had the taste and the time and the eager creative urge to achieve it, aided by family and staff. Table carpets might be out, ousted by new table surfaces of marquetry, veneer and gesso, but an ever-increasing range of occasional furniture was coming in.

Among the great houses the new delight in tall rooms resulted in immensely tall, ornate beds entirely dominated by their fabrics in the Continental manner. But bed and furniture embroideries remain today representing not only the costly professional work but also the less expensive fabrics and no less laborious stitchery of house-proud domestic needlewomen. Their sets of embroidered hangings, coverlets, pillows, their cushions and suites of furniture upholstery are the peculiar glory of late Stuart embroidery and continued far into Georgian days, even to some extent into the 1760s.

Details in the Northampton inventory point to fashions that had become more widespread towards the 17th century's end. Their richness can be gauged from a set of bedroom furniture: "A field bed of purple velvet with tester and single vallance imbrodred highe with flowers piramides wise with gold twiste and spangles, five curtens suteable with a purple satten quilte suteable imbrodred two carpetts [that is table cloths] of purple velvett suteable, the one for a square table, the other for a Cupboorde, furniture [soft coverings] for a large chaire, two high stooles and two lowe stooles suteable unmade and gold toppes—CCXX li."

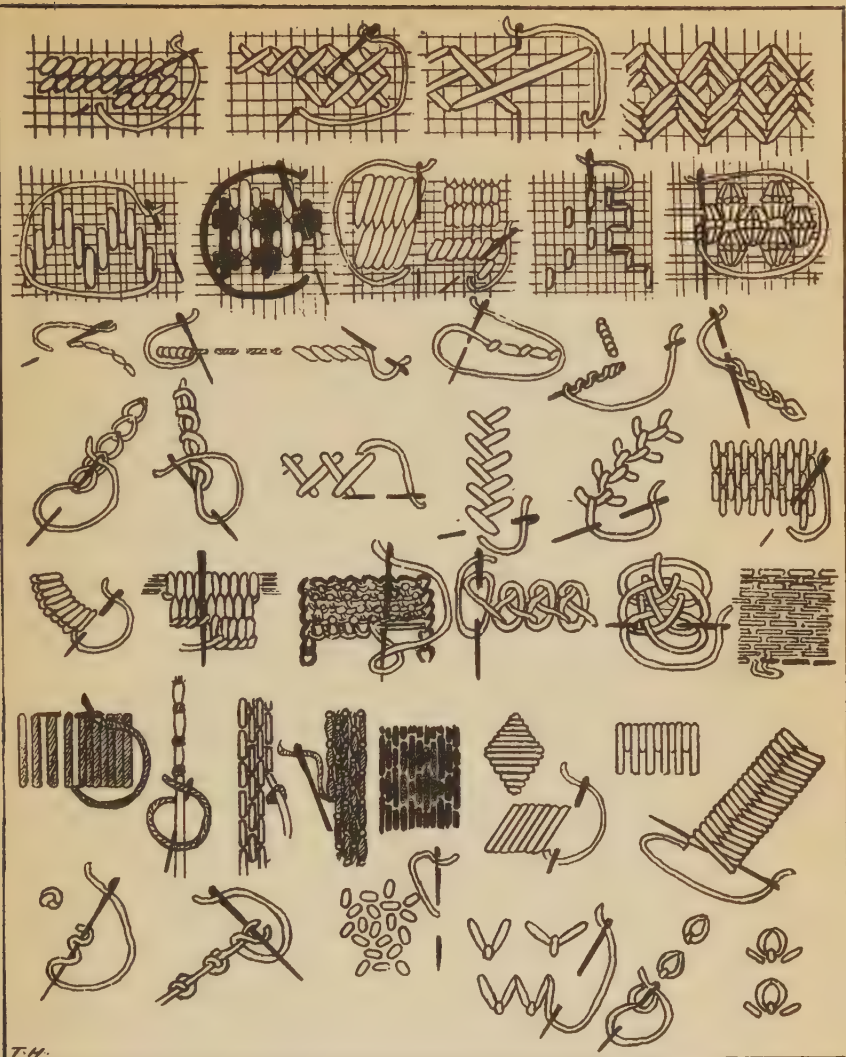
Continental influences in post-Restoration England are to be noted in other home embroideries as diverse as band samplers and the Florentine and Hungarian work in zig-zag bands of colour used for furniture upholstery. Bead embroidery was becoming important too, and one finds delightful bead caskets and the like, no brighter or gayer than the embroideries they aped. But the greatest influence on late Stuart embroidery undoubtedly came from the Orient (see Chapter 2) despite 18th-century restrictions on the import of glamorous Eastern fabrics such as Steele's "tawdry, pie-spotted, flabby, ragged, low-priced thing called callicoe".

The outstanding embroideries of the early 18th century have been mentioned above, the furniture embroideries in fine tent stitch and more solid cross stitch. Many splendid chairs, settees, stools and screens remain, their warm beauty contrasting with the flashing silks and quilted satins of 18th-century bedroom embroideries for bed and stool and cradle. Dress around the turn of the century was still exceedingly decorative, both men and women delighting in deep lace frills and embroidered ribbons. Evelyn describing a fop of the period declared, "A fregat newly rigg'd kept not half such a clatter in a storme as this puppet's streamers did when the wind was in his shrouds."

Improvements in weaving coupled with more rapid changes in fashion discouraged large undertakings, however, and the period's strident dress embroidery tended to be left to professionals. Ceremonial dress was fine stitched in gold and silver and heavily fringed, a rich field for the disastrously fashionable pastime of "drizzling".

Among men's clothes waistcoats especially were delicately embroidered in metal threads and silks: the future George IV appeared at his first ball in a white silk waistcoat "embroidered with various coloured foil and adorned with a profusion of French paste".

More collectable dress details are found among embroidered aprons and bags, quilted and embroidered petticoats and charming babywear. It may be noted that most of the embroidery associated with the period is in silks, and this in itself tends to result in more elegant design and daintier stitchery. That notable 18th century needlewoman



STITCHES

Top row on counted threads: tent; cross; long-arm cross; perspective.

2nd row on counted threads: Florentine; Hungarian; three versions of croaching, upright and plain; Holbein or double running; rococo.

3rd row: back; overcast; stem; coral; bullion; split.

4th row: chain; twisted chain; herringbone; fishbone; feather; brick.

5th row: buttonhole; detached buttonhole; hollie; braid; plaited braid; darning.

6th row: laid; couched; three details of underside couching showing upper and underside of work and the general effect; satin, straight and diagonal; long-and-short; basket.

7th row: French knots; double knot; speckling; fly (three versions); link (isolated chain stitches now called lazy-daisy); tête-de-bœuf (the same with additional stitches).

Mrs. Delany made such pieces as "a black satin court petticoat with sprays of natural flowers". Queen Charlotte and her daughters embroidered many of their own dresses, and much really attractive white work was accomplished, but there was already a tendency to achieve quick results with the use of gimps, chenilles, ribbons, spangles, beads and the stiff gauzy muslin known as aerophane. By the 1770s embroidery patterns were appearing in women's periodicals and duly reappearing upon dress and pole screen and some that remain are stitched with notable exactitude in showy satin stitch. But comparatively few furnishing embroideries remain that do justice to the neo-classical phase associated with Adam architecture.

The 18th century is associated with more pictorial embroidery. As early as about 1700 Celia Fiennes during her horseback journeys had noted a house at Epsom possessing many fine pictures under glasses of "tent stitch satten stitch gum and straw work", to go with furniture and hangings, but large pictures in quick stitches resembling brush-work are associated with such later 18th century enthusiasts as Mary Linwood and Mary Knowles. Here again may be noted a striving after quick effect and an effort to find new outlets for fancy needlework rather than the earlier urge to meet practical needs with beautiful stitchery. Other embroiderers towards the end of the 18th century worked small pastoral or sentimental pictures resembling contemporary prints in fine floss silk and occasionally in hair, and there were such variants as darned pictures on taffeta and embroidered maps.

Contemporaneous samplers reflected the same pictorial trends, but may better be regarded as a study in child education than as needlework. Small needlework pictures resembling monochrome prints continued to be produced into the 19th century, becoming rather larger in size and in stitch.

Dress embroidery from the late 18th century includes shadow effects in muslins and extremely dainty sprig patterns, and for minor furniture some extremely fine tent stitch was achieved. The early 19th century was an impressively successful period for patchwork, never more hand-

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some or well composed, and for the least ambitious needlewoman there were fringes to net and purses to knit and adorn with beads. Soft colour harmonies were approved in contrast to later brilliancies—lavender, lilac, Indian red, olive green. One needlewoman's achievements during this period were recalled by the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1846 when Miss Catherine Hutton died at the age of 90. The previous year she had stated: "I have made furniture for beds with window cutains and chair and sofa covers; these included a complete drawing-room set. I have quilted counterpanes and chest covers in fine white linen, in various patterns of my own invention. I have made patchwork beyond calculation. . . . I worked embroidery on muslin, satin, and canvas, and netted upwards of one hundred wallet purses."

Nevertheless the tendency was to develop speedy work involving the minimum of trained skill and this was fostered by the design of various machines for sewing and embroidery. Among home embroiderers this culminated in what has come to be known as Berlin wool work. Machine-made double-thread canvas facilitated the accurate measured arrangement of cross stitch patterns corresponding with designs on squared paper: these became extremely successful from the 1830s. Mrs. Gaskell's Miss Matty "had once been able to trace patterns very nicely for muslin embroidery . . . but . . . Miss Matty's eyes were failing and I doubt if she could discover the number of threads in a worsted pattern or rightly appreciate the different shades required for Queen Adelaide's face in the loyal woolwork now fashionable at Cranford".

So overwhelming was the Berlin wool work that the alternatives available for the 19th century needlewoman tend to be overlooked. The Gothic revival prompted a re-discovery of old embroideries and Miss Barbara Morris has pointed out the important contribution made by the embroiderers serving the many new churches of early Victorian days, led in the Anglican church by G. E. Street and among Roman Catholics by A. W. N. Pugin.

From about 1858 such embroideries as cross stitch pictures began to be worked in wools coloured with the harsh

aniline dyes—purple was the first—that such pioneers as William Morris were soon condemning: “henceforward there is an absolute divorce between the commercial process and the art of dyeing . . .”. The madder-based, intensely rich but fleeting alizarine crimsons followed from 1869; synthetic indigo from 1897. It has not been realised fully perhaps that much of the “stuffiness” of the Victorian home was an attempt to protect these fleeting dyes which even at the time were condemned by those with an eye for beauty such as Lady Marian Alford who protested in 1886: “When embroidering with the coloured materials of the day we are in constant dread of what disastrous effect may be produced by the first shaft of sunshine that may fall from our moderately illuminated sky, through the uncurtained window.”

It is now becoming possible to appreciate some of the 19th century’s many somewhat indiscriminate enthusiasms, their complexities of couched braiding, their excursions into medievalism, their faded “art shades”, their “Japanese” screens crowded with embroidered cranes and bamboos, their elaborate imitations of Kashmir-Paisley shawls. William Morris’s familiar contributions to 19th-century embroidery began in the second half of the century. He showed “tapestry” embroideries at the 1862 exhibition and he and his wife together worked crewel flowers on indigo serge for their bedroom walls at the Red House.

Even Morris with his delight in functional design declared that embroidery “is not worth doing unless it is very copious or very delicate—or both”. Patterns and materials issued by his firm appeared from the 1870s, mainly in darning stitches in floss silks. With a view to colour purity these were specially dyed for Morris by Thomas Wardle of Leek, whose wife established the Leek Embroidery Society to such effect that their woodblock designs on tussore silk, worked in their own dyed silks, came to be known in the 1880s as Leek embroidery.

This was the great period for so-called art needlework, which to many meant patterns on crash linen or serge instead of canvas to be worked in soft-toned colours. Basically however the intention was to use artists’ designs and colour schemes. These were most often worked out in

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crewels in the period's "crewel stitch", an irregular stem stitch following and emphasising the curving lines of the pattern motifs.

Even early in the 19th century the state was well aware that the industrial revolution necessitated an extension of "a knowledge of the Arts and of the Principles of Design among the people, especially the manufacturing population of the country". It is possible to applaud most criticism expressed by the Juries and other commentators upon the Great Exhibition: the difficulty is to reconcile such theories with the creations that met with their approval. From a select Parliamentary committee in 1837 developed the School of Design at Somerset House and all subsequent schools of art and general encouragement of art teaching. In 1872 the Royal School of Art Needlework was first proposed, to which Morris, Burne-Jones and others gave original designs, and in 1884 came the Home Arts and Industries Association. Yet today even Lady Marian Alford, writing as recently as 1886, seems to recall a vanished world: "The gown . . . will probably never again be the vehicle for home embroideries. But there are other articles of personal adornment which will always be available for the fancies of decorative taste—the fan, the purse, or satchel, the apron, the fichu, the point of the shoe, and the muff. . . ."

Chapter Two

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: EASTERN INFLUENCES

NO people on earth, declared Philip Stubbes in 1583 in his *Anatomie of the Abuses in Ailgna*, are so intent on foreign novelties as the English. Domestic embroideries, especially, are a constant reminder of this eager explorative delight. Materials, designs and techniques down the centuries offer fascinating evidence of how English women, furnishing home and wardrobe, have followed in the wake of explorers and merchant men, have welcomed each new treasure, and then applied homely native genius to adapt and imitate and make it theirs. To a slight degree one can trace the pattern of Europe's expanding communication with the world as Portuguese, Dutch and English successively dominated the eastern seas, but the very confusion of their styles and the freedom of their adaptations are part of the charm of these foreign-flavoured embroideries. Indeed, even at the time many Elizabethan, Stuart and Georgian merchants had only a hazy notion of the countries or ports that supplied their exotic trade.

The Roman Empire was trading with China in the earliest days of the Christian era; by the second century the Chinese were already admired for "precious figured garments, resembling in colours the flowers of the field, and rivalling in fineness the work of spiders". Arabs by sea and Italians by land gave medieval Europe a glimpse of the Orient's silks and gems as well as a taste of its pepper and ginger and precious cloves. Yet when the mid-14th century decline of the Mongol dynasty closed all China to the western world for a mere hundred and fifty years men forgot even that such intercourse had ever taken place.

As Miss Beryl Dean has pointed out, artistic expression

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in this country developed as it did in the remote past of the 4th to the 12th century because of the influence of established art in the Christian East. By the end of the 13th century *opus Anglicanum* was superb. Medieval embroidery in England was a sumptuous glittering tribute to the splendours of this less distant East; and one's imagination is feasted with records of rich stuffs, dazzling samit, Persian cyclatoun, gold-shot silken baudekin, pillows "wrought among the Sarasyns". There are endless references to gold embroideries. When Richard II's queen wore an embroidered gown the "branches of rosemary and broom" were in "Cyprus gold". By the 16th century, however, references are nearly all to Venice gold, for the Turks made it virtually impossible for the English to trade in the Mediterranean and Venice was the all-important intermediary for Eastern luxuries.

It is tempting to linger over the Crusaders' eastward-looking contribution to domestic luxury and on the consequent course of embroidery, or over the entirely practical applications of needlework to the needs of warring knights. Their armour linings were of the quilted work associated with Arabia and Persia, and their equally essential heraldic ornament was in the appliqué work that was old in Egypt two thousand years before. But when domestic embroidery re-emerged as a factor of consequence among English crafts in the 16th century Eastern influences were expressed in new forms more immediately recognisable today. Even so it must be remembered that for every silken embroidery that has remained, very many more in vulnerable wool must have perished. Brilliant untwisted floss silks coming from the Levant were sold for as much as half a crown an ounce in 1511. "Venice gold" was even more costly when the Coopers' Company bought five pounds for their new hearse cloth in 1563, paying fifty-four shillings a pound.

The designs in old pattern books seldom enough tally with contemporaneous embroideries, but it is perhaps significant nonetheless that Thomas Geminus considered it worth while to issue one of the earliest English pattern books "very profitable for Goldsmiths and Embroiderars" in 1548, and that its patterns were designated as "Moryshe and

Damashin" (Moorish and Damascene). As would be expected the designs avoid the representation of created things and consist of closely interwoven scrolls only slightly foliated and exquisitely balanced. This book is the more interesting since a few expressions of Levantine ideas do in fact remain among Tudor embroideries, in costly Italian velvet, itself first an Asiatic material, applauded by Marco Polo. Bed hangings, for instance, and chair seats have been noted with the velvet cut in such arabesque outlines and appliquéd in the Levantine manner on contrasting coloured velvet or satin. These are in the style described at the time as "embroidered in velvet" (see Chapter 8).

Levantine carpet work, too, became conspicuous in 16th-century England. In the mid-16th century English merchant adventurers formed the Muscovy Company to travel across land to Moscow and so to the Caspian and Persia. An English representative was established at Constantinople in 1578 and from 1580 the Turkey Company was active, becoming the Levant Company in the 1590s, and trading with Smyrna. Imports prompted the English development of "turkey work" by professional and amateur with no knowledge of Levantine carpet knotting techniques. On chairs and tables woollen pile work variously achieved proved a hard wearing luxury. Some of these angular scrolling designs and alternating diamonds and octagons seen in portrait backgrounds were imported, some made by professionals and home embroiderers passing double strands of wool through canvas fabric, knotting them in and cutting to create a pile effect that might be emphasised by the use of backgrounds flatly worked in cross stitch. Sheffield Castle in 1582 possessed eight long and thirteen short turkey carpets. The Earl of Northampton in 1614, among many pieces of turkey work, had some specifically of English manufacture, and even some turkey foot carpets, as well as rarer Persian carpets.

The English tendency to soften formal design into floral waywardness is to be noted even here and remaining turkey work specimens often show stiff flower groupings, closely massed, angular and indistinct. Formalised, squared-up flower patterns were a feature, too, of some 17th century

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samplers (see Chapter 12). Much turkey work, of course, was professional. There are innumerable documentary indications of its widespread use, such as the purchase of six turkey carpets for £6 3s. 0d. recorded in the Howard accounts of the 1620s. As late as 1680, when caning was the latest Eastern novelty for chairs, the anxious woollen manufacturers cited the plight of the turkey work chair makers in their protest to Parliament.

For further evidence of how Tudor needlewomen adopted the closely diapered formal patterns of Near Eastern inspiration one need look no further than the silk embroidered table carpets or cupboard cloths. Today some of these are particularly valued for their lively pictorial borders or medallions, but to their creators the major labour was the central area of close lozenge diaper work often in the clear tones of red, yellow and blue associated with much Levantine work. One in the Victoria and Albert Museum, of the mid-16th century, measures 18 ft. 6 in. by 4 ft. 6 in. and the linen ground is entirely hidden by the silk stitchery, about four hundred stitches to the square inch. Here again the work may well be professional. But even in some Tudor emblem embroidery more suggestive of domestic work the same tendency is traceable, each emblem presented in an individual diamond of the diaper.

This is linked in mood with the so-called black work that delicately enriched much Tudor dress. Black work's immediate source was obviously Spanish. But it is more important to recognise its derivation from the Near East through centuries of the Arabian black work on linen. The conquest of Granada in 1492 ended nearly eight hundred years of Moorish rule but wealthy Spaniards missed the Eastern luxuries of the Moors, and very considerable numbers of "Moriscos" remained in Spain. The work may well have been introduced to England by the Spanish-dominated Netherlands. Much of it was precise, exquisite work and early English specimens maintained the formal arabesque and geometrical manner. As Englishwomen turned the work to a more flowery style, however, they also introduced more variety of stitch and colour. The effective use of black and touches of gold required a brighter sun

than England's and gradually the whole theme changed to the wholly English coiling stem embroidery (see Chapter 5).

The Portuguese rediscovered China in 1514 and a report in the following year mentioned that "the merchants of the land of China also make voyages to Malacca . . . and bring musk, rhubarb, pearls, tin, porcelain, and silk and wrought stuffs of all kinds". This was the century that Portugal dominated the Far Eastern seas. The Levant Company did attempt to trade beyond the eastern Mediterranean, but English merchants, like the Dutch, relied largely on what the Portuguese brought home to Lisbon. But then came the royal union of Portugal and Spain and this trade was forbidden. This was in 1580. In 1595 the Dutch and in 1601 the English sent their own fleets to the Orient.

As a result, by 1609 "Britain's Bourse" had opened in London for selling Oriental imports. English professional embroiderers were always anxious to protect their craft from swift-fingered, ill-paid Orientals, but Charles I specifically allowed the import of "quilts of China" and quilting is one of the Eastern styles of decorative needlework notably developed by Englishwomen in the 17th century (see Chapter 11). Another 17th century development was the widespread use of satin at 8s. or 12s. a yard.

The Earl of Northampton, conspicuous for his early acquisition of Oriental work, possessed a number of "*China quiltes*" in 1614, such as one "stitched in chequer worke with yealow silke the grownde white", valued at £4. The royal yellow of China was a notable colour in this work and yellow on white for the quilting was characteristic, the back stitch often worked in a diaper or meander pattern. Tenuous thin-stalked imaginary flowers might be embroidered over the quilting in satin stitch.

There was also considerable use of chain stitch over quilting. This was a stitch associated with imports from India, the Dutch-controlled East Indies and the Portuguese colony at Goa, and at its best achieved notable effects of texture by the direction of the stitches without recourse to shading colours. It is associated with much of the 18th century, but as early as 1614 the Earl of Northampton owned a velvet carpet "wrought on with cheine worke".

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During the 17th century trade with India developed. The East India Company—"The Governor and Company of the Merchants of London Trading into East India"—who obtained a charter in 1600, established agents in Bantam, Borneo and elsewhere and made contact with Chinese merchants but in 1613 the Great Mogul gave them the opportunity to trade on the Indian mainland. When, in 1657, Cromwell enabled the Company to establish itself on a sound business basis the great invasion of Indian and pseudo-Indian design began. Even before the end of the century so many private traders were at work that the Company had to reassert its monopoly by obtaining a new charter from William III.

It is important to note that for a time English embroidery was exported to India, not as models but in the course of trade, and this must be borne in mind when assessing the quality of the Indian influence on English embroidery. In 1618 Sir Thomas Roe, Ambassador at the court of Johangir, advised the Company to send "Imbrodred coates of Indian fashion, for our wastcoates they cannot use here . . . Gloves, hangars, scarfes; by theis only they picke out the workes. In steade of sweete baggs, rownde cushions gathered like cloke bags to lean on. Any of theis in needleworke or imbroiderie will sell cent. per cent or not much les; all embroiderie being fallen in value, for they have learned by ours to do as well."¹ But in any case the early phase of importing genuine Indian designs into England passed all too soon and very many Indian painted and printed cotton patterns were Anglicised adaptations sent to India for reproduction.

With so much activity on the eastern horizons throughout the 17th century it is perhaps surprising that as late as 1664 Evelyn could express all London's excited amazement when embroideries sent by Jesuits from China to Paris arrived in London: "Glorious vests wrought and embroidered on cloth of gold, but with such lively colours that for splendour and vividness we have nothing in Europe that approaches it . . . flowers, trees, beasts, birds, wrought in a kind of sleve silk, very naturall."

This was the kind of work that transformed English

¹ *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India 1615-19*, edited by Sir William Foster.

embroidery, although India was supplying many of the models at this time. The schoolgirl gaucheries of the Stuart raised stump work were abandoned as women caught the fever to transform the major furnishings of their homes. Indian cottons including flowery "chints" were allowed into England free of duty in 1631 and some embroidered work came too, somewhat "Persian", thin and reticent. Thereafter the Indian and Anglo-Indian influence on Stuart hangings became too great to be assessed.

Leaves in all their infinite variety as background detail had always appealed to tapestry and needlework designers and "forest work", "verdure" and "small leaves" hangings are to be noted from very early times in a heavy, Italianesque manner. But the patterns inspired by the Indian printed and painted cottons such as the most typical tree-of-life became so widespread and conformed so closely in style that they have acquired the name of their period and are known merely as Jacobean. They expressed a fresh approach to the subject, altogether more fluent in line, more lively and fantastic in mood.

This crewel work receives detailed consideration in Chapter 3. Here it is enough to stress its immense contribution to the Stuart home, and at the same time to recognise how soon "glorious" Chinese embroideries began to change still further the Englishwomen's ideas of the little fantastic worlds they created for their dreaming. The slanting tree forms began to rise from aggressively hummocky ground, the branches rippled with quick springy curves, the leaves and flowers became restless, many-pointed imaginings, the birds open-beaked and surely screeching. The difference is noted in the gradual change from crewels to silk for the embroidery. A handful of home-dyed reproductions of Indian printed colours eventually became replaced by bright colours in considerable variety, their shimmer enhanced by the glossy satin stitch and long-and-short stitch of silk work. This may be regarded as loss as well as gain. The earlier crewel hangings, with their close affinity to block-printed lining papers, displayed notable line and texture effects with a wide variety of filling stitches during a period that loved the finely articulated detail of lace.

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As for their themes, the hangings that were being produced before the end of the Stuart period offer a wonderful mingling of Anglicised-Indian and Chinese motifs. Occasionally a set is to be noted where Oriental hangings have been imitated laboriously on quilt and cushions in amateurish English work.

There were, of course, complaints and import restrictions, and these, as obviously, merely stimulated demand and encouraged imitative English needlewomen. Thus in 1701 the use and wearing of "all wrought silks, Bengals and stuffs mixed with silk or herba, of the manufacture of China, Persia, or the East Indies, and all calicoes, painted, dyed, printed or stained there", was forbidden. In 1720 the prohibition embraced "any callicoe stitched or flowered in foreign parts with any colour or colours or with coloured flowers". In 1749 the wiredrawers secured the prohibition of foreign-made metal embroidery, and gold or silver thread, lace, fringe and the like (see Chapter 4).

Now as at the time it is difficult to differentiate exactly between the Oriental sources of inspiration for domestic embroiderers. India, the Malay Archipelago, Siam, China and isolationist Japan were too remote, too unreal in a fabulous, glamorous way to be identified with facts of geography or commerce. Thus imitations of Oriental lacquer acquired the term *japanning*, as distinct from the true lacquer work which was "right Indian" or "right Japan". And embroideries became caught up in the general excitement that spread through Europe under the name of China work or *chinoiserie*. William III and Mary delighted in Chinese furnishings and by the first half of the 18th century the baroque style was surrendering everywhere to the wiles of *chinoiserie* and the closely associated exaggerations of sophisticated naturalism now known as *rococo*.

By then real Chinese work was reaching England, including incredibly finely woven silks for chair furnishings and the like. The elaborate Chinese wallpapers were all for western export and at the time (1757) Sir William Chambers's book *Designs of Chinese Buildings* was welcomed in the *London Chronicle* because he hoped it might "be of use in putting a stop to the extravagancies that daily appear under

the name of Chinese, though most of them are merely inventions and the rest, copies from the lame representations found on porcelain and paper hangings". Sir William's descriptions of Chinese gardens with their grottoes of artificial rocks and their mossy tree-stumps found many eager imitators, including embroiderers.

Critics of *chinoiserie* were often justified. Mrs. Montagu in 1749 commented bitterly: "We must all seek the gaudy *gout* of the Chinese; and fat headed Pagod and shaking Mandarins beat the prize from the finest works of antiquity." Lady Florence Ludlow had a pagoda-roofed sedan chair in 1752. As *The World* put it in 1755, there was no difficulty in being whimsical. But *chinoiserie* embroideries are the more appealing today for the very unreality of their Oriental notions. Some, of course, followed contemporary *chinoiserie* tapestries such as those of Soho and the Beauvais and Aubusson versions of French *chinoiserie* with its own distinctive characteristics. There was, for example, the famous Beauvais set "L'Histoire du Roi de la Chine".

At this great period of furniture embroidery one finds chair and settee embroideries where the usual medleys of big naturalistic flower heads surround panels of the *chinoiserie* pagoda-phoenix style. Yellow, imperial colour of the Chinese Ching dynasty, was a favourite background and contributed considerably to the air of importance these old embroideries possess. Even when the flower heads dominate the design they tend to copy the favourite season flowers of Chinese work—prunus, peony, lotus, chrysanthemum—and share the Chinese liking for big, richly textured leaves.

Their base may be a porcelain vessel in Oriental style: as early as 1688 the famous *Treatise of Japanning* by Stalker and Parker illustrated such a flower group—massed flowers, substantial two-handled porcelain vase, and, above, two fantastic birds, one pursuing a butterfly. But the 18th-century embroiderer had many models (see Chapter 19).

Mrs. Delany in the mid-18th century included jonquil parroquets with purple asters among her chair embroideries. Cheval and pole screen panels offered more limited areas for less laborious efforts: Chippendale illustrates a folding

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screen that might equally well be enriched with Chinese wallpaper or *chinoiserie* embroidery.

Often a screen shows little figures more or less Oriental in dress and features even when their theme is basically a classic myth. Even bucolic scenes "after Teniers" have been noted with *chinoiserie* details including fantastic birds and unsubstantial background outlines. On couch or coverlet one may find small "islands" of closely worked embroidery, busy with people and buildings, trees, bridges and so on, vastly enhanced by the surrounding emptiness. Some black backgrounds are ascribed to France, but in England too there was a liking for dark brown or black associated with Oriental lacquer and copied more immediately from tapestries. Border details may be copied from imported porcelain. One finds use, or misuse, of all the lucky symbolism of Chinese Ching dynasty embroideries, from bats and butterflies of happiness to the Chinese wave motifs that set out the Chinese "five colours" (red, yellow, blue, green and lilac), a pattern treatment suggested by many of the hummocky foregrounds found in English pastoral embroideries. Occasionally one may note an attempt to introduce one of the eight Buddhist emblems of happy augury—parasol, gold fish, vase, lotus, seashell, mystic diagram, standard, wheel—or one of the Taoist attributes of the Eight Immortals, the lotus, gourd, fan, sword, castanets, flute, flower basket, and bamboo tube and rods.

In some instances, however, one becomes aware of the Oriental inspiration in less tangible features, such as the sense of spacing or the feel of the perspective which in any case has always received some form of conventional treatment from the more skilled embroiderer. Among embroidered panels of the period it is enlightening to compare the ever-popular Orpheus and his lute with an early Stuart rendering of the subject.

On dress the 18th century opened charmingly with much use of quilting for handsome satin petticoats. These served as rich background to gowns of embroidered silk and to such details as stomacher, apron and bag more richly embroidered in the *chinoiserie* mood (see Chapter 18).

On their gowns women made daring experiments in

chinoiserie and associated rococo embroidery but one quickly becomes aware of the limitations facing embroidery designers who attempted to adapt Chinese wallpapers and Indian cotton prints—a somewhat vague and romanticised naturalism that tended to straggle weakly, interspersed with the gaudy notions of rococo exaggeration.

Around the mid-18th century some delightful “Chinese” rooms were created. Chinese wallpapers, Indian chintzes, Chippendale-Chinese furniture, blanc-de-Chine porcelain and Coromandel rugs might set off exquisite embroidered soft furnishings either bought or worked at home by tireless amateurs. But perhaps the most interesting fact is that already English women were feeling their way back to the flowers they knew and loved, away from the Oriental flower formalities. The stitches were still mainly the limited range of silk surface stitches associated with Oriental work, long-and-short, stem, satin, and the French knots often known as Peking stitch.

The superficially classical mood of the 1760s had no place for such fantasies, but in the later 18th century the great developments in English relationships with India inevitably produced their own fascinating reflections in English domestic embroidery. At this time the inspiration was in fact largely Indian rather than Chinese. Furniture embroideries became insignificant, but embroidered dress details had never been daintier.

The gauze or muslin handkerchief worn over the bodice and the reduced, frilly version of the fashionable apron escaped the earlier 18th-century tendency towards crude, heavy colours. One sees hanging pockets, embroidered and quilted bags, long gloves with thin, perhaps straggly ornament, and embroidered muffs.

Indian dimity, muslin and the like were so charming that the English weavers were quick to copy them. English printed cottons were excellent and some of their lightly Oriental designs were copied in embroidery. So highly were these printed fabrics valued that even some lovely quilts, with all the exquisite needlework they entailed, were ornamented disappointingly with appliqué centre-pieces and patches of printed cotton instead of embroideries (see Chapter 11).

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Indian embroiderers made particularly delightful use of shadow effects on filmy transparent fabrics, and quantitatively the great Indian-inspired development was in what is generally known as white work. The great vogue for tambour embroidery in the late 18th century indicates the lasting popularity of chain stitch effects, here worked with a steel hook instead of a needle. In the 1850s the commercial possibilities of this once-Indian occupation had claimed half a million workers in Ayrshire and Belfast.

At the end of the 18th century cotton was in vast demand, even for winter wear, and the needlewoman's embroidered muslin and darned net helped to meet a demand for women's and children's embroidered wear and especially for charming if voluminous baby clothes through much of the 19th century (see Chapter 5). There was renewed interest in China around the turn of the century. Missions to China in 1793 and 1816 were unsuccessful and only a little embroidered evidence remains, such as pole screen panels. The incomparable contribution of the Orient to English home embroidery was largely lost for the moment in laborious European mediocrity. The final indignity came when English amateur needlewomen, still striving to capture the inconsequential fantasies of laughter-loving Orientals, found themselves offered commercial Oriental embroideries in which the fabric and even its pattern tracings had been made and prepared in England.

Chapter Three

WOOL WORK

OLD inventories and wills are tantalising treasure to the needlework collector. But one point they make insistently. However curiously the words are spelt, stitchery in Levantine silks is embroidery; Venice gold and Belmont lace may be wrought or laid, but ornament in worsted crewels is, unequivocally, worked. Today when idleness is virtually unknown and the extravagances of silken embroidery may be dismissed by some as charming triviality, the homespun riches of crewel work are acquiring the importance in the eyes of collectors that originally only their creators allowed them.

One does not find early samplers in crewels. One does not expect gold thread or spangles among the softly twisted wools. Crewel work is the vernacular form of ornamental stitchery. It was created at great labour but comparatively little cost to be taken into constant and prolonged use, since moth would ruin any work left aloofly on show, just as surely as the hard treatment expected of it would betray poor needlework.

Mellow persuasive wool embroidery must be envisaged against this workaday background, absorbed as it was into the very heart of the big, straggling households where warmth and wear took precedence over glitter. Only then can one appreciate how richly the lovely colours, imaginative stitches and bold patterns must have satisfied those who lived with the medieval hangings, the Tudor cushions, the Caroline bed furniture or early Georgian chairs and couches that must be included in a survey of English wool needlework.

Some of these articles receive more detailed consideration

later in this book, but the intention here is to indicate briefly the scope of this work, both for today's collectors and for those who like to visualise the setting in time and place that may be ascribed to an individual specimen.

Work remains the operative word. Working all day like a horse at making her hangings, was Pepys's description of his "poor wife" when she caught the prevailing enthusiasm for refurbishing her rooms. Those who credit past generations of housewives with lives of monotonous leisure must assuredly make exceptions of the innumerable company preoccupied with crewel work. Spinning the wool and growing or procuring the plants and extracting their colours to dye it frequently preceded any stitchery, even for embroidery-loving late Elizabethans—yellow from heaths or onion skins, red from moss or madder, yellowish-brown from southernwood, reddish-purple from lichen or cochineal. Reds in wools dyed earlier than the late 17th century have seldom kept their colour.

Crewels find scant mention in early shop inventories although in large towns, in Newcastle, say, or Darlington, one may find a few pounds of colour, glowing or subdued, noted among the aniseed and raisins of the sun, the ink-horns and onion seed. Large self-sufficient establishments such as the Howard home at Naworth in the early 17th century limited their purchases to fabrics and silks, gold thread, laces and "pennyskeen thread", but their accounts frequently show such items as "to a spinner and a carder for a moneth, iij*s*. iiij*d*.", or "to a spinner for 5 weeks, 2*s*.". In many households even the linen ground would be home produced, as testified by many an inventory note of "x stone of linte spune in yearne, redie for the webster, 50*s*."

By definition crewels are thin worsted yarns, originally closely twisted and made of long staple wool with the fibres lying parallel. Such wools appeared in needlework, tapestry, fringes, clothing and even, in the eastern counties, in a coarse, coloured bobbin lace. Caddis or caddas was a term widely used in the second half of the 16th century for crewels and especially for their application in such a manner as Laneham's "red caddiz gyrdle", mentioned in his *Letters*, 1575; "caddas or cruel ribbon" in the *Book of Rates*, 1675,

or Shakespeare's "puke stocking, caddice garter" in *Henry IV*. The late sampler work in worsteds was known as crealing according to the *Mid-Yorkshire Glossary* of 1876.

The word crewel was long treated as a monosyllable, spelt, for instance, crule in Rogers' *Agriculture and Prices* in 1494 and 1496, and crewle in the Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York in 1502: "Item for blake crewle to purfulle [outline] the roses vjd." It might be even croyl or croull. But by the mid-16th century it had become two-syllabled in such references as a Hardwick Hall inventory "a lytle stoole covered with Needlewircke checkered wth white, blewe & tawnye cruel", and again in Fletcher's *Noble Gentleman* in 1625 "an old hat . . . and on it for a band, A skein of crimson cruell". By the 17th century the currently accepted spelling was coming in. Isaac Walton in 1653 referred to the making of a mayfly "his body with greenish coloured crewel". Johnson in 1755 dismissed it as yarn twisted and wound on a knot or ball, and the word appears to be derived from the Old English *clew* for a ball of thread.

As for crewel stitch, the term has been applied to both stem stitch and long-and-short stitch and to neither with much justification since remaining specimens of early crewel work tend to be in tent stitch and the alternative was the extraordinary wealth of stitches that celebrated the needlewoman's triumphant escape from surface covering into the freedom of surface decoration. Stem stitch, one of the simplest rope-like over-and-over stitches, could be used for thin stalks, leaf veins and curling tendrils, but also as a filling stitch when arranged in close rows following the outline of leaf or petal and permitting subtle tone gradations. Long-and-short stitch became popular in the 17th century as a filling stitch, each row of the stitches fitting into the previous row, and used for mingling the colours and achieving soft shadow effects.

It is a pity that the one notable remaining example of wool work from pre-Elizabethan days is the bizarre Bayeux tapestry, in any case regarded by many as Norman work. About 226 feet long, 18 inches wide, crudely drawn and with the harsh worsteds coarsely couched upon the fabric,

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this is mainly the historian's delight, for its lively account of an incident from the Norman conquest. By then, it appears, embroidered hangings had long been used in England, for rich pictorial records of history and heroism, though painted cloths proved adequate substitute for centuries to come, and cheap; 34 yards for the counting house of their new hall cost the Pewterers' Company only 11s. 4d. in the late 15th century. By the 14th century England had acquired a high reputation for woollen fabrics and among bed furniture in particular there appears to have been considerable demand for such picturesque and often heraldic or emblematic wool work as the old bed of blue worsted belonging to Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester in 1397, worked "with a stag of yellow worsted", and a coverlet and tester of red worsted with "a white lion crouching under a tree". By Elizabethan days, after the bleak intervening years of struggle and pestilence, a house might still have "painted cloths hanging about the chamber", but a rich establishment would enjoy tapestry hangings, and it was in association with this luxury that many needlework hangings appeared, in company with needlework chairs and stools.

This was the beginning of a great period for household needlework, in stem stitch, cross stitch, and most enduringly and conspicuously in the tapestry-like tent stitch that individually fortifies every stitch in the loose linen canvas with a smooth, reticent regularity calling for bold design and perhaps some parts in silk to avoid monotony.

Randle Holme in 1649 in his *Academie of Armory*—that is, heraldry—lists silks as well as crewels among the schoolmistress' needs, but for the Elizabethan the cost was a major consideration. Even when the motifs of cushion or table carpet were in cross stitch with long-armed cross stitch for the background, the weight of the ornament was considerable: in 1582 John Hudson of Newcastle sold sewing silk at £1 6s. 0d. a pound, sewing crewels at 3s. 4d. a pound. Sewing gold, of course, was more costly still—2s. 9d. an ounce in 1592. Lady Elizabeth Ackwith in 1608 bequeathed "a carpet cloth of crewells, which is of divers colours, and in the middest and eyther end wrought over

with goulde". Touches of silk among the crewels were very much in keeping with the mood of the late 16th and 17th centuries and Sherley's *Bird in a Cage* refers to "our mixed audience of silk and crewel gentlemen in the hangings".

Turkey work was a favourite upholstery treatment in the 17th century, presenting a pile carpet effect with wool: this was knotted at the back and clipped at the front, often with a coarse crewel cross stitch background to the pile motifs (see Chapter 8).

Cushions and carpets—colour and pattern and enduring warmth to banish the hated bare appearance of seats and tables—were the first preoccupation of the Elizabethan and early Stuart wool embroiderer (see Chapters 6, 8, 9). In general her patterns kept to a squared layout but the trend was towards freer, less rigid and richer effects, aided by the deliberate tone of the tent or cross stitch. Tent stitch was popular throughout the early and middle years of the 17th century but among such individualistic amateurs as needlewomen it is foolish to expect any style to be limited to a set period. In the Howard accounts already mentioned there is an intriguing reference in 1623 to a "yellow say bed sewed with black crewel". A bedstead had been gilded not long before: toning woollen curtains would be handsome indeed stitched with a large-scale version of the meander or coiling stem work often found in black enriched with touches of gold lace and spangles on Elizabethan clothing. In the first half of the 17th century some large, somewhat Italianate hangings were worked in bewildering detail of stitch and motif, still entirely covering the canvas ground. But by then the magic of Oriental colour and light, of flowing line and fantastic figure, was setting the needlewoman's thoughts awhirl.

The East India Company dazzled all England with the wonders of lacquer and porcelain and painted cottons (see Chapter 2). These Indian painted palampores or pintadoes were charming to distraction. Never must woolly tent stitch have appeared more monotonous, more nearly dowdy. By the second half of the 17th century the great era of crewel work in the new manner had begun and on the most im-

portant fabrics in the house, the "furniture" that draped the period's splendid beds and provided the heads of the household with their proud substitute for royal thrones.

Neither tent stitch nor the old modes of expression disappeared quickly. The mid-17th century is associated with some crewel work bed furniture in tent stitch as well as the many crewel pictures that inclined especially to a limited range of Old Testament scenes, such as appear in silken raised or stump work (Chapter 13) and beads (Chapter 15). But such things were far removed from the domestic work of crewels—rich-girl hobbies as artificial a proof of skill as the creation of a marchpane swan by a prospective household cook. Indeed it is surely less surprising than some authorities suggest that the whole style of the later 17th-century bed hangings shows a complete dissociation from all the wooden moulds and painted faces, the mica and feathers and other tinselly frivolities that had tended to oust the good stitchery of stump work.

One important feature of this raised work, however, was the use of a background satin that could be left in view, often entirely without resort to appliqué. An open background—of cotton strengthened with linen—was of course a notable feature of the new crewel work. The old burden of background filling was renounced in favour of lighter and increasingly more flowing, rhythmic compositions. Bed furniture is considered in Chapter 9. Here it is enough to recall that a set of bed furniture would include three valances for the sides and end of the bed and three bases for the lower frame. Usually there would be three, four or five curtains, each of several widths of the twill that was but 20 inches or less across: usually two and a half or three widths for each curtain at the top of the bed and five for each at the foot. Yet to a needlewoman accustomed to the background filling of tent stitch and cross stitch of the early 17th century the new manner of working such hangings must have made the task appear joyously free and varied.

Patterns included sprinklings of isolated flower sprays but decorative and imaginative rather than the old botanical "slips"; pales or diamonds enclosing similar sprays, the borders themselves consisting of flowery stems; and the

most familiar tree-of-life designs. In these the characteristic foreground or base of the pattern consists of hummocky hillocks alive with rabbits, deer, flowers and other details, and from these rise the regularly-spaced tree forms serpentine up to the top of the curtain and providing the underlying rhythmic repetition for all manner of huge leaves and flowers, of exotic, unreal splendour. Often the intertwining branches leave little background exposed—and even this is filled with birds, wildly crested and impossibly tailed. The whole design gradually drifted away from the old rounded renaissance outlines and squared layout into wilder, more sinuous forms, becoming richly luscious and then diminishing again into sparser, more attenuated detail. At its peak the design was almost startling in its staccato detail of leaf and petal, beak and wing. There was a world of difference between, say, an Elizabethan rose motif and the prick-leaved, tendrilled vine of late Stuart days.

It is perhaps significant that the work coincided with a great lace vogue in England. When Dutch William could pay £290 for the lace on six razor cloths, and £485 for cut-work needlework on twelve pocket handkerchiefs, lacy effects were to be expected of the home needlewoman. The fastidious copy-book representation of English flowers and birds was one of the main delights of Elizabethan embroidery—the kind of work defined in Dame Anne Shereley's will of 1622-23 as a carpet of "gilly flores and woodbynes" and a "Turkey work carpet of cowcumbers". It returned to some extent in the 18th century but meanwhile here was work in which every leaf and every stem was a delicate fantasy in a variety of stitches that achieved to perfection the sense of textures and shadings the worker desired.

Some designs are composed wholly of leaves, and in many the work is at least mainly in the one lovely emerald green that has often faded to a deep dull blue, a fashion of the day that was but a natural reaction to all the glitter of lacquer and mirrors and silver furniture. Sir William Temple in *The Gardens of Epicurus* (1685) dwells on the inclusion of an all-green section of the garden "wild and shady". Other crewels are wholly in red or in simple blendings of reds and yellows, although more colourful results were produced



B1. The New Testament and the Psalms, 1633, bound dos-à-dos, the pages measuring only $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. $\times$ 2 in. Covered in white satin embroidered with carnations and pansies in satin stitch, in silks and silver thread.



B2. Late 16th-century embroidery achieving a tapestry effect with extremely elaborate pictorial detail probably copied from a French engraving. It is worked in tent stitch on linen canvas, in wool highlighted with silk. The fragment is probably from a long strip intended for the tightly-stretched pelmet of valance of a standing bed.

too. Lighter and more varied colouring was introduced late in the 17th century and some of the loveliest specimens contain also light, dark and bronze green, several shades of blue and warm yellows and browns. But the colours are never so bright or varied as those of silks. Celia Fiennes, visiting Windsor at the end of the century, noted in the queen's closet "the hangings, chaires, stooles and screen the same, all of satten stitch done in worsteads, beasts, birds, ymages and ffruites all wrought very ffinely by Queen Mary and her Maids of Honour".

Photographs do not always convey adequately the scale on which these designs were worked or their three-dimensional effects. There may be stout basket stitch perhaps for some of the main stems, stem stitch, double back stitch or chain stitch for tendrils and leaf stalks. Edges to leaves and large branches may be in long-and-short stitch to give crisp outlines, while closely adjoining rows of herringboning and buttonhole stitch follow the outlines of leaves and petals in subtle changes of tone and emphasis, often centring on small areas of background only lightly veined with speckling. An effective detail is the working of leaves so that only the veins disclose the underlying fabric. The use of feather stitch has not been noted in crewels of this period but appears in some recent reproductions. The cautious collector naturally avoids specimens in the gaudy, soft wools of the later 19th century, associated especially with shades of mauve and mauve-pink and ugly yellowish greens. Hand-woven linen is not of itself proof of age, but obviously machine-woven linen, extremely even-textured and light in weight, indicates modern work.

Silks gradually replaced crewels on bed furniture as design became lighter and freer and in danger of appearing a mere tangle of sinuous, thinly decked chain stitch branches. But by then overstuffed furniture was replacing the hard wood and loose cushions of 17th-century homes and here crewels came into their own again to take the rub of wear, with silks perhaps for high lights (see Chapter 8). There was a return too to the old covering stitches and something of the old naturalistic flowers appeared in the designs, but often widely spaced now and tending to be arranged in formal

vases or baskets. Some furniture carried armorial bearings, and there was limited use of the Florentine or flame-stitch work introduced in the later 17th century, with zig-zags of colour redeemed by the careful choice of shades.

Tent stitch might still be used in applied panels or worked over canvas that was tacked to the upholstery fabric and afterwards drawn out. Mrs. Delany makes frequent references to furniture embroidery in her famous mid-18th century letters: "I have packed up a box of needlework for you—the great chair that was begun so long ago, with all the worsteds and silks that belong to it." Her patterns might be either the realistic flowers she loved so well or the rococo style typified by "festoons of shells, coral, cornflowers and seaweeds". She had chenille made specially for her requirements, with soft worsteds instead of shimmery silks, based upon thread of flax. But one suspects that furniture embroidery was largely reserved for the long hours of candle-light that thwarted her more ambitious artistic efforts with paint and scissors, dexterity and imagination. "At candle-light cross stitch and reading gather us together," she wrote while staying with the Duchess of Portland, and "my candle-light work is finishing a carpet in double cross stitch on very coarse canvas to go round my bed".

As tapestry, damask, haircloth and the like ousted needlework from fashionable furniture too, crewel work experienced an uneasy period of near-eclipse. Pictures in crewels have seldom proved successful (see Chapter 6). At best in the late 18th century they consisted of somewhat painstaking work in the manner of contemporaneous prints, becoming coarse and ugly in the many sentimental variations on the theme of Charlotte at the tomb of Werther. At worst they were vast attempts at oil paintings in stitchery. By the 19th century large Scriptural pictures in crewels and silks and chenilles were being worked on sarcenet. At a time when cube effects in marquetry were popular similar patterns in "perspective" were achieved with series of straight lines of graduated length forming diamonds, the angles suggesting basket weaving.

The 19th century's great vogue for cross stitch on square canvas appears in a number of variants, some combining

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beads, chenille or silks with the soft Berlin wools. It appears strange today to recall that cross stitch was known as sampler stitch at the beginning of the 19th century before Berlin wool work took hold.

Today this woollen cross stitch is sometimes, mistakenly, called tapestry. Another mistake is to call cross stitch by the name of tapestry stitch for the latter resembles tent stitch except that it is more usually taken over two or more threads of the fabric whereas tent stitch is taken over one crossing of warp and woof threads, to achieve close-set rows of small slanting stitches sloping down from right to left. Speedy double cross stitch might be known as the railway stitch. Another early Victorian variant consists of looped stitches cut to give a raised pile effect to parts of a cross stitch pattern or picture.

By then the very word crewel had largely disappeared from use and in 1858 Simmond's *Dictionary of Trade* referred to "crewels . . . now called Berlin wool". The extremely soft "zephyr" yarn of Berlin was merino wool from the sheep of Saxony manufactured in Gotha from 1765 and dyed in Berlin in bright fleeting colours. Harsh aniline dyes began to be used in 1858. The fashion for crewel work as distinct from the square canvas filling with Berlin wools returned in about 1860, the emphasis being upon soft colours and unobtrusive matt-surfaced materials. Couched chenille work had a variant in arrasene embroidery worked in tapestry stitch or tent stitch with a fine wool chenille thread. Only to this artistically sombre period may be attributed such final killing blows as the terms crewelist and, horror of horrors, crewellery.

Chapter Four

METAL WORK

CLOTH of gold is a term that has never become entirely prosaic or of the 20th century. With its warp of gold threads and weft of coloured silk it calls up a picture of that most splendid, glittering pageant of all time when Henry VIII met Francis I in fabulous magnificence. The heavy splendour of declining feudalism and the brilliance of the rising Renaissance were recorded for all time in a gigantic masque so resplendent that it could only be described as the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

For two sparkling weeks in the June sunshine of 1520 the two young monarchs and their retinues of nobles made high holiday near Guines in France. Henry's camp was a wooden palace, the state rooms hung with cloth of gold and silver, the ceilings rich with tapestries. Even the gorgeously emblazoned ship that carried him across the Channel had sails of cloth of gold. No practical considerations regarding the living conditions of Henry's five thousand attendants in their vast tented encampment can spoil the dazzling picture of the kings' jewelled and embroidered splendour, the brocades and black and crimson velvet worn by their nobles according to rank, the four hundred archers in white embroidered with silver fleurs-de-lys, the day-long festivities and tournaments, the evenings of dancing in fantastic fancy dress.

Never again could there be such a spectacle, but the gold and silver with which weaver and embroiderer brought the sun, moon and stars to their monarchs' homage still express the richest, and some of the loveliest, of the needlewoman's creations, and their story is one of special skills and craftsmanship in which this country has played an important part.

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The radiance of setting and costume on the Field of the Cloth of Gold was a tribute to the gold and silver wiresmiths of England. Their skill produced the fine wires essential to both weaver and embroiderer, and the story of this gorgeous style of embroidery is linked throughout with the technical advances in the craft. It is a long story. The silk vestments given by King Canute to the Abbot of Croyland were embroidered with eagles in pure gold; and already that abbey possessed such splendours as the coronation robes worked with golden apples which had been worn by Wiklaf king of Mercia.

Until the 12th century gold thread for embroidery was always made from the solid metal. Skillets of gold were beaten into filmy sheets, kept pliable by frequent annealing. But even on the stiffest of fabrics the metal was difficult to work and proved far more successful as a brilliant casing to threads of silk. This had always been achieved by spiralling narrow strips of metal around the silk, but succeeding centuries witnessed changes in the metal itself, in the way it was prepared and in the workmanship of its application, all serving to guide the student who seeks to authenticate and date antique specimens.

The Oriental contribution to metal thread embroidery is a variant of the European method. Instead of thin metal, the core of orange silk is wrapped in gilded paper. Silvered paper is wrapped around white silk. This is the method still applied in the untarnishable "Japanese gold" widely used today and introduced in the 1860s.

In medieval days the sheets of pure beaten gold were merely cut into narrow strips to form lengths of flat wire for twisting around the silk threads. The result was strong and flexible, but immensely costly, and as early as the 12th century the English wiresmiths developed a method of reducing the quantity of gold required to cover the silk. The basis of this change was the development of a technique for making round wire, not in gold but in silver. When it was found that silver which had been gilded could be drawn into wire with equal success, and then flattened, the embroiderer could be presented with a cheaper and still brilliant "gold thread". Thread, more strictly termed

silver-gilt, has predominated in such embroideries ever since.

It was a triumph to discover that gold would adhere tenaciously to the silver rod while it was being drawn into wire, the ratio of silver to gold remaining unaltered no matter how finely the metal was drawn. The early method of drawing the wire was fantastically primitive. Two men sat on facing swings with a thin cylinder of the gilded metal held between them by leather girdles around their waists. By repeatedly pressing their feet against an oak billet fixed upright in the ground between them they gradually stretched the cylinder into a length of gold-covered round wire. This was then passed across an anvil and hammer-flattened.

Gold and silver were immensely important to the Medieval ecclesiastical embroiderers who won fame for *opus Anglicanum*. The stately beauty of this work can still be appreciated from many remaining specimens, such as the Syon cope (Fig. 1). Backgrounds were enriched with couched work, making the most of the heavy metal thread by laying it upon the surface of the fabric instead of attempting to stitch with it. Short transverse stitches in linen or silk secured it to the fabric, these themselves forming delicate diaper patterns. At its finest in early work the technique included underside couching, giving durable and very pliable results. This is described in detail by Beryl Dean in *Ecclesiastical Embroidery*. The linen thread was brought up through the linen and silk background materials, taken over the fine "Cyprus gold" thread and returned into the same hole, "pulling a little loop of gold down and through onto the back". Then the couching thread was brought up to the surface again in preparation for the next stitch. Perfect spacing of these stitches produced attractive chevron patterns on the rich surface of gold.

Surface couching was superseding this method in England by the mid-14th century; by the 15th century much of this ecclesiastical embroidery was worked separately and applied to the velvet ground, with couched rays and spangles to link the applied work and unify the design.

An extensive trade in embroideries was developed with Continental countries, covering ecclesiastical vestments and

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robes for the nobility. Remaining examples are but an insignificant fraction of the number recorded in foreign wills and inventories. Even as early as 1240 Matthew Paris could record Pope Innocent IV's preference for fabrics decorated with metal work produced by the new process. As a result, most of the robes worked in the Vatican were sent to England for embroidering, including vestments for the Papal choir.

Domestic accounts at this period include payments to staff embroiderers; records showing them to have been employed, with assistants, in decorating home and dress textiles of all kinds, including the gorgeous heraldic work that developed from the 12th century. Edward III's issue rolls record such intriguing details as payment to a London embroiderer for a velvet vest embroidered with pelicans, images and tabernacles of gold.

By 1400 "the number of maidens embroidering in silk and gold wire" was found worthy of remark. The Broderers' Company, founded in 1430, was a considerable guild for more than half a century. Imports of gold and silver thread, wire, lace, fringe, embroideries, were variously restricted by almost a dozen acts of Parliament from the reign of Richard III to that of George II, the goods to be forfeited and importer and seller heavily fined. Even if never wholly effective they indicate a continuing home industry. As with other guild-bound crafts of the period, there was also an attempt to control the quality of professional work: Henry VI made it illegal and punishable to sell "works of Broderie of insufficient stuffe and unduly wrought with gold and silver of Cyprus and gold of Lucca, and Spanish laton" [hammered brass].

Richard II, the most notable dandy of the later 14th century, delighted to emblazon his dress with gold and found ready mimics among his courtiers. Clothing and hangings were embroidered or "broched with gold" in increasing lavishness until 1485 when Henry VII denounced dress extravagance. By the end of the century embroidery in gold was reduced to little more than a domestic art. Professional work was largely restricted to such commissions as the new cloth of gold pall ordered by the Pewterers' Company in

1502 after they had paid fourpence "for the sight of a cloth of gold". This had twelve flowers of gold at 19*d.* each among the figures of St. Michael and other details applied to black velvet. The pall belonging to the Brewers' Company is another rich relic of this period, 8 ft. 6 in. × 4 ft. 1 in., its borders elaborately ornamented with figures of saints and shields of arms in silver gilt and silks yet leaving one aware of the embroiderers' pleasure in the minor background motifs of bearded barley. Only very few other Livery Companies now possess these ancient palls, such as the Vintners' which is of cloth of gold and purple velvet with emblems of the Virgin and Saint Martin and a figure of death as well as the Company's arms.

The glamour of young king Henry VIII's court soon brought about a revival in gold embroidered clothing. Nearly 450 ounces of fine gold and 850 pearls were taken off Henry's robes and returned to the goldsmith for the king's use again according to a report in 1517. Finer threads than could then be made in England were imported from Nuremburg, but laid work, flat and raised, with English threads, continued in heavy splendour. Craftsmen skilled in this work were eagerly seeking employment, many being embroiderers of church vestments affected by the Reformation, although church embroidery had long lost its high quality. Professional embroiderers with considerable staffs became numerous enough to warrant the re-establishment of the Broderers' Company in 1561. But pillows, cushions, such informal men's wear as night caps and innumerable other metal-enriched domestic embroideries produced throughout this period display the fresh imperfection of amateur work. F. G. Payne in his survey of Welsh embroidery quotes and translates an early 16th-century description of a doublet given to Lewis Morgannwg: "... Veins of molten gold, a work of fire, other veins of silver work . . . A pall as black as Calvary, shot through with sunbeams. An acre plaited in silver twigs. . . ."

Wiresmiths continued to make flat wires for ornamenting woven cloth of silver, such enrichment being known as pinched-plate work: it is noted occasionally in remaining embroideries, brighter than any thread and set like jewels

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among patterns of metal thread and purl. Distinction was made between flat wires and round thread in domestic inventories and expense sheets. Until the mid-16th century gold and silver for converting into wire for thread was bought almost exclusively from Venice, Florence and Genoa. But the demand for gold wires for domestic embroideries was not really satisfied until vast quantities of precious metals began to arrive in London from South America. At court, the flamboyant colours in vogue could then be embroidered lavishly in gold and silver. Gold and silver brocades, velvet and satin, taffeta and damask, gold and silver cords, embroidery and laces combined to make the dress of both men and women gorgeous in the extreme.

Costume embroidery has always tended to be professional work and even in the mid-16th century it was costly enough. For example there is record of some work by William Ilgrave, embroiderer, for Edward VI, his ornamentation of jerkin, doublet and hose costing almost £10, with the Venice and Damask (Damascus) gold he used costing another £18 more. Mid-16th century prices have been noted such as gold fringe 6s. an ounce, gold wire, 4s. an ounce. Such costume embroidery was frequently in somewhat square, closely interlaced arabesques, giving a stiff outline to false sleeves and the like.

It was in the late 1560s that the greatest single technical advance on behalf of the embroiderer in gold and silver threads was made in England. Previously some gold and silver had been sent to Nuremburg to take advantage of that city's steel draw-plates which produced finer wires, of unvarying diameter, and considerably more quickly, than English methods. A much greater length of wire was obtained at less cost. The draw-plate was introduced to England in about 1565 by Daniel Houghsetter and Christopher Schutz. The resultant silver-gilt wire could be made fine enough for the thread to be used in the lace work that gave the finishing touch to so much of the richest late 16th-century dress.

Within fifteen years many people were engaged in the "Trade, Art and Mystery of Drawing and Flatting of Gold and Silver Wyre, and Makeing and Spinning of Gold and

Silver Thread". This craft was destined to become of considerable importance: in 1740 more than six thousand people, mostly women and children, were employed by the master wire-drawers of the London parishes of St. Giles', Cripplegate, and St. Luke's.

Gold thread today is made basically by the same processes as those then developed, employing barmen, drawers, flatters and spinners to convert the metal into gilded thread. The barmen prepared the metal into rods made from sterling silver strengthened by a small additional quantity of copper so that they could be drawn without risk of fracture. Legal standards laid down in 1698 were: silver wire, 98 per cent sterling silver to 2 per cent copper; silver-gilt wire, 95 per cent sterling silver to 5 per cent copper. This metal was shaped into a cylinder measuring about four feet in length and nearly one inch in diameter. It was then plated with gold leaf: the rod was heated in a charcoal brazier, then plunged into a solution of sal ammoniac and covered leaf by leaf with the gold to a depth of one-fiftieth of an inch. Each gilded bar was then wrapped in paper and heated in the fire until the gold covering melted into a solid plate of even thickness which, when cold, was burnished with an agate. A legal ruling defined the weight of pure gold to be applied to each rod.

The gilded silver rod was then drawn through a series of a hundred or more holes diminishing in size from one inch to less than one-hundredth of an inch, drilled through rectangular steel plates, gradually reducing its diameter and increasing its length. This process was repeated through further series of holes of lesser diameter until the silver bar, reduced to wire of gossamer delicacy, and wound tightly on reels, was ready to be passed through flattening rollers. This was an important process, not only flattening the wire but also making it longer by as much as a quarter: since about 1850 the rollers have been of highly polished hard steel, giving a bright surface to the wire. The resultant flat wires were twisted closely and firmly around a core of well-boiled orange-tinted silken thread. So uniformly was the wire spiralled around the core that the silk was entirely concealed.

At first the new thread was known as sewing gold and in 1572 cost 5s. an ounce. The inventory of a Durham draper taken in 1597 lists "32 yards of silver and gold thread, 18 pence". To many the embroidery of the late 16th and early 17th centuries appears the richest and most fascinating ever accomplished. And those coiling stems jewelled with flowers and fruit, on stomacher and sweetbag, those fantastic emblems on hangings and bed curtains, all might be given the final touch of rich loveliness with flat wire and gilded thread.

The "pipes and purls", the bugles and spangles and coils of bullion that abounded on many of these embroideries had a useful purpose in taking the brunt of the wear and thus protecting the more perishable silks, but the metal thread was applied too for the sheer joy of its rich glitter. The black embroidery that never seemed to become entirely native to the colour-loving English home embroiderer was richly transformed when relieved with touches of gold in the new fine gold thread, fine enough to be passed through the material if necessary instead of being restricted to the more showy couchings and braidings, but worked as far as possible on the surface of the material.

A sense of great richness was achieved by passing the thread backwards and forwards closely over a slight padding of parchment or cord; a faceted effect, catching the light at every movement, was achieved with a raised stitch such as close basket stitch worked over lines of string. More delicate gold work on fine lawn can only be imagined from portraits. Philip Stubbes (1583) wrote of ruffs "either clogged with gold, silver, or silk lace of stately price, wrought all ouer with nedle woorke, speckled and sparkled heer & there with the sunne, the moone, the starres, and many other antiquities straunge to beholde".

Gold in association with vividly coloured embroidery silks was eminently to the liking of the late Elizabethan. Silken flowers, for example, appear with coiling stems of gold in plaited braid stitches. Courtiers' gifts to Elizabeth I scintillated with such work: "By the Countes of Bedford, a dublet and fore part of murry satten embrowdred with flowers of golde, silver and sylke, and lyned with orange

tawny tapheta . . . By the Lady Shandowes . . . a swete bag of crymson taphata embrowdred with Venice gold and spangills . . .” The inventory of the Earl of Northampton’s possessions, 1614, gives an incomparably rich picture of the leading embroidery styles. Here metal embroideries range from cloaks and doublets to pillow beres and sweet bags. Records of his sweet bags even makes specific references to embroidery with pinched-plate.

Such richness was too enchanting to escape the attentions of the profiteer. As early as 1604 gilded and silver threads were seized upon by Roger Pennel and Richard Grimstone who obtained an “exclusive patent for sixteen years” from James I in return for providing him with a substantial pension. Neither of these men was directly associated with the craft: they merely had the power to license the process to others in return for a fee. No matter how long a maker had been engaged in the production of such thread he was now compelled to pay tribute on every skein he made. A royal proclamation was published declaring that anyone buying or selling gold or silver thread not sealed by the patentees was liable to corporal punishment and a fine. When the patent expired in 1620 the king sold patents to individual members of the craft, permitting them to seal and issue their own products. At that time in London alone about seventy-five master wiredrawers and spinners were established.

Complaints regarding the poor quality of the thread issued by some makers prompted the Wire-Drawers’ Company in 1640 to order all members to register devices so that the origin of any skein could be traced. One end of every skein was then sealed with the wire-drawer’s mark, the other with the spinner’s seal.

The early 17th century continued to delight in embroideries enriched with metal threads. Already, however, there was evidence of a desire to make embroidery a less laborious pastime—a trend that developed disastrously a century later. As yet the standard of stitchery was high, but the loose embroidery silks of the day were tiresome and difficult to handle, and obviously many a girl found it more pleasurable to achieve quick results with the period’s more easily man-

impuluted silver-gilt purls, cords and braids. Some metal-embroidered sword belts and military scarves remain from the 17th century, handsome enough if not particularly well worked: these are considered to be professional embroidery.

The mid-17th century saw further improvement in the making of silver-gilt thread. Originally the metal had been twisted around the core of silk by using a primitive spinning wheel, but now a spinning frame was evolved, superseded a century later by the bobbin spinning machine. A steady speed was essential for a smoothly finished surface, and the process used may be determined by careful inspection beneath a magnifying glass. The modern method, known as fibre plating, is a power-driven version of the late 18th century machine. The resultant thread, known today as gold lace, has the opulent beauty of solid gold and inspection under a microscope will fail to detect any irregularity or surface imperfection.

Before the introduction of mechanical power into the wire-drawers' workshops each ounce of gilded silver was calculated to produce a mile of normal quality wire. This meant that two ounces of gold would gild about one hundred miles of silver wire. The proportion of wire used with a given quantity of silk was also standardised before the end of the 17th century. Three qualities of silver wire were made: bright, fine and common. Bright work required six ounces of wire to four ounces of silk; fine, six ounces to four and a half ounces; common, six ounces to five ounces. Until 1867 the spinning upon silk of copper, brass or any alloy inferior to silver was illegal, as was the use of silk mixtures. It was permissible, however, to spin base metals upon thread, yarn or worsted.

The later 17th century was such an important period to the silversmith that metal embroidery was bound to reflect the vogue. Much solid embroidery was filled in with it. Book covers and glove gauntlets, for example, are to be found couched with patterns of formal flowers wholly composed of metal threads or cords outlining each leaf and petal and filling it with cross strokes, with no variety of thread or stitch. Fashionable costumes were tricked out with gilt and silver braids, but soon the difficulty in obtaining the

metal severely limited its use, and by the time the shortage was less acute the whole trend of domestic embroidery was changing. So far as work in gold and silver thread was concerned, by the 18th century there could be little competition between professional and amateur work, and the story is largely of impressively expert but wholly impersonal costume embroidery, much of it for men. There was for example, the meandering vermicular line worked in silver gilt thread to form an all-over background to designs in coloured silks (Fig. 5) and copied widely in yellow silk. This became known as the Stormont pattern when Lord Stormont made it fashionable and one finds references to it as the Stormont when applied to such diverse industrial arts as porcelain decoration and japanning. It was popular with hasty professional quilters as a poor substitute for the elaborate symmetrical grace of the traditional patterns.

Many quilted silk or satin petticoats at this period were backstitched with elaborate diapers over which flowers were embroidered in silver-gilt, silver and coloured silk threads, and the Hanoverians favoured considerable use of heavy gilt tassels and fringes. Less ambitious amateur talent produced skilfully embroidered and wholly charming aprons of silk and satin, most usually worked in flat stitchery with metal threads outlining flowers and forming stems. Some are trimmed with bobbin lace of silver thread. Strikingly vivid effects were achieved by couching parallel lines of gilt thread to form wide curving bands or huge flower petals of glinting metal, the couching threads patterned to increase the sense of sparkle (Fig. 9). For less assertive detail the gilt threads were spaced slightly apart. Their weight and stiffness made the short apron hang well. (See Chapter 18.)

The sale of gold and silver thread was enormous during the reign of George II, vast quantities being used for uniforms. Coats and waistcoats, gowns and petticoats all shared the vogue and court costumes were ornamented with notable elaboration. For example, in the *Fitzwilliam Account Book*, 1734 (Mildmay Archives, Essex Record Office) it is recorded that Mr. H. Smart, laceman, was paid £78 17s. 6d. "for a broad gold trimming for my Lady Caroline's petticoat when she held up the train of the Princess Royal at her

marriage with the Prince of Orange, March 1733". The same year Mr. Basner, laceman, was paid sixteen guineas "for a white Waistcoat flowered and embroidered with gold for the Earl of Holderness for my Lady Ancram's wedding".

Mrs. Delany in 1738 describes to her sister some of the dresses worn at the Prince of Wales' birthday party. The men, it appears, wore nothing out of the ordinary, "much finery, chiefly brown, with gold or silver embroidery and rich waistcoats". But the embroideress in Mrs. Delany was roused by the Countess of Huntingdon's fashionable rococo petticoat—intended of course to show in the manner of the day—"of black velvet, embroidered with chenille, the pattern of a large stone vase filled with ramping flowers that spread almost over a breadth of the petticoat from the bottom to the top; between each vase was a pattern of gold shells and foliage embossed and most heavily rich; the gown was white satin embroidered also with chenille mixed with gold ornament, no vases on the sleeve but two or three on the tail".

Later in the century equal elaboration is described on the dresses worn at court functions, but with more emphasis on silver. Queen Charlotte and her daughters delighted in festooning their dresses with flowers and wheatsheaf motifs in silver embroidery and many another amateur devised quaint elaborations of ribbons, spangles, beads and the like in which every kind of metal wire and thread was incorporated.

Mainly, however, this was the century of the professional, and, despite the Act of 1749 forbidding the import of foreign-made embroidery, gold and silver thread and lace, fringe, wire and plate, it was a period of fierce competition in which the Wire-Drawers' Company recorded what must have been spectacular seizings and burnings of contraband. Probably far more, however, was destroyed by drizzlers, those elegant, ruthless ladies of the later 18th century who carried sharp scissors in their *etuis* and snipped off any gold ornament they could lay hands on to sell its metal for pin money.

An interesting word that occurs time and time again in old records of metal embroideries is purl. As early as 1523

Skelton in *The Garlande of Laurell* refers to girls at embroidery: "Some pirlying of golde theyr worke to encrease." Apparently there was direct association originally between purl and pearl and sometimes one can suspect a writer's enjoyment of a minor pun, as when Sidney in 1586 refers to a chariot of carnation velvet enriched with purl and pearl; by 1882 Caulfield and Saward in their *Dictionary of Needlework* could list pearl-purl as a "gold cord of twisted wire resembling a small row of beads strung closely together". This harks back to the early use of the word on purl laces, purl braids and so on, when purls were the tiny loops or picots introduced as border ornament, so that the purl was the decorative edge of a piece of lace, as distinct from the plain edge or footing. Cotgrave in 1611 and Phillips in 1706 define purls as the small edging on bone lace and this may have been the meaning when a purse belonging to Thomas Cromwell was described in 1527 as "of black vellet pyrled with golde threde". Elizabeth I in 1600 had a French gown of black velvet "with an edge of purle, and pipes [bugles] of gold". The word appears to have been applied freely to lace made of metal thread, frequently involved in prohibitions, such as those of 1635, 1662, 1698, when foreign purls were forbidden and English work made under licence. Eventually their wearing was prohibited in an attempt to check the drain on the coinage. Nevertheless, Malcolm's *Anecdotes*, 1714, refer to a lady robbed of a scarlet cloth coat so overlaid with gold and silver lace that it might have been of any colour.

Alternative definitions of purls in the *New Oxford Dictionary* give them as pleats or frills or, more usefully, as gold or silver thread outlines to embroidered motifs, as on Henry VIII's "Clothe of Tissue . . . poudered with redde Roses purled with fine gold" (1548). This associates the word with the old verb to purfle (pourfiler) or make an ornamental border, which was out of contemporary use but still recognised in Bailey's early 18th-century dictionary as a sort of ancient trimming for women's gowns. "Line the gown through with plush perfumed, and purfle all the sleeves down with pearl!" is quoted from Fletcher's *Women's Prize*, 1625, and a memorandum of 1601 at the

Victoria and Albert Museum refers to slips for applied work including "fore grete brenchis purfled with crose stych yn corse canvys", accompanied by tent stitch flower motifs strikingly enriched by their black cross-stitch outlines.

Nevertheless some records remain unexplained, such as the two ounces of gold and silver purl listed in the Naworth household accounts for 1620 "for making a perle dressing" for one of the girls. For such a record one must accept the present day definition of the word as the finest gold wire twisted to form a rounded tube "made in a series of continuous rings like a corkscrew" as defined by W. G. P. Townsend in 1899. This could be applied at length in border patterns, coiled into circles, or cut into short lengths for sewing in position like so many dainty, flexible beads. "Vj plighes of fine Lawne for sleeves for the Quene with bandes of pyrles of golde" are mentioned in the Duke of Rutland's Papers 1535.

Palsgrave uses the word in this way "To pyrle wyer of golde and silver, wynde it upon a whele as sylke women do," and this is the more interesting because Mary, daughter of Henry VIII, when a princess received a present in 1543 of a "little pirling whele". In 1536-37 according to their records the Wire-Drawers might be paid the then considerable sum of £7 17s. 0d. for the pipes and purls for a single gown. In its heaviest, bulkiest form purl has come to be known as bullion and the bullion stitch familiar in early 18th century pictorial embroideries and elliptical flower centres sought to reproduce the same effect.

A bill dated 1732 reproduced in the *Dictionary of Furniture* for the state bed at Houghton designed by William Kent includes over £480 for double rich gold bullion fringe, gold bullion roses, and tassels, among other gold ornament worked, for smooth, glinting brilliance, over a ground of vellum.

Modern use has tended to apply the word purl only to its least important variety. Records refer to gold purl, but what remains today, too unimportant for removal, is the seldom-mentioned silk purl made with tarnishable copper wire closely wound with silk before being coiled. This figures importantly on old book covers, looking glasses, caskets—

wherever constant handling is liable to spoil creamy satin and delicate stitchery.

It may be noted that even tinsel originally caught its glitter from an interweaving of gold or silver thread into a silk or woollen fabric. Even by the 1650s, however, Blount noted it glistening "like stars of fire" from the base metal copper mixed with the silk.

Spangles of various sizes attached with yellow silk have proved conspicuously durable for augmenting the embroiderer's stitchery, although today's glitter is small compared with the prominence and brightness accorded them in many an Elizabethan portrait. They twinkle starrily among the saints and angels on *opus Anglicanum* copes, sewn direct to the rich fabrics when embroidered motifs were worked separately and applied. Elizabeth of York in 1502 bought them in a range of shapes "square pieces, and sterrys, dropes and points", but hers were from a copper-smith and were merely "after silver and gold", intended for brief use on jackets as fancy dress "against the disguising". There is evidence in plenty that they appeared in fine gold and silver and silver-gilt in Tudor wardrobes, high-lighting embroideries and needlepoint laces.

Cotgrave in 1611 defined spangle-gold as "gold thin-beaten for spangles" and Herrick surely had silver in mind when he delighted in a fringe "spangle-work of trembling dew". But here again the base metal is found more often today. At first spangles were shaped from small rings of wire hammered flat in various shapes; later they were stamped and some given a subtler sparkle with engraving. Their Elizabethan popularity increased in the early 17th century and they may be found on gloves, on stump work, on picture panels. They were lavished on shoes at a time when shoe "roses" might cost £4 or £5 a pair. In the 18th century they continued on muffs, shoes and men's coats and waistcoats. Mrs. Delany described Lord Villiers' appearance at Court "in a pale-purple velvet coat, turned-up with lemon colour, and embroidered all over with Ss of pearl as big as pease, and in all the spaces little medallions in beaten gold, *real solid*, in various figures of cupids and the like".

The fashion even lasted into the 19th century, with

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spangles on the period's pompous court dresses and with ladies "industriously spangling muslins" as mentioned by Washington Irving in 1807. Silver gilt spangles were still in demand in 1870 "wrought to figure six-petalled flowers".

Aiglets or metal tags, square, pointed or shaped like acorns, were often made of gold or silver and used like spangles for more conspicuous garment-trimming but are associated especially with the 17th-century's points or ribbon ties.

The problem of keeping gold and silver embroideries lustrous was a constant source of concern in days when embroideries were intended for long and hard wear. Dr. Lewis, the celebrated scientist, in 1753 recommended "stale bread crushed very fine, mixed with powder blue, rub it very well over the silk or satin. Then shake well. Rub the gold or silver flowers with a piece of crimson grain velvet." But here was nothing new. Two hundred years earlier, when the Coopers' Company ordered the embroidery of their crest and arms in metal work upon their new hearse cloth, the embroiderers' accounts include two small six-penny entries "for bread to make clean the work".

Chapter Five

BLACK WORK AND WHITE WORK

EMBROIDERIES remaining from Elizabethan days declare themselves unmistakably. They are as forthright, as self-assured, as the people who used and wore them—flaunted them would be a better term. Designs show bold diapers and strong rounded curves and coils. Motifs are never merely flowers and leaves: they are pansies and carnations, oak leaves and acorns, on fat, heavy stalks. It is only when they are studied in detail that one realises how formalised they are, how representational, adhering to conventions that save them from the painful three-dimensional realism of later enthusiasms for crowded flowers. There could be few greater contrasts than Tudor and Victorian ideas on embroidered roses.

Inevitably the results lack any subtlety deeper than the curiosities of emblem and device copied from books of their day, and they show to greatest advantage, perhaps, when reduced to their simplest presentation in monochrome. Black and white schemes were much to the liking of their creators, retaining their distinction among the riot of heavy colour. One notes their use on dress and hanging, in paned or striped doublet and hose and in strapwork combinations of velvet and satin for rich upholstery. In embroidery one finds them at their simplest in surface stitchery in black silk upon white linen (the so-called black work) and in the opposition effect of solid white motifs against a shadowy background of fine net (darned net or laces). Only towards the close of the 16th century was more delicate shadow tracery achieved, at least in quantity, with diapers of drawn and cut work—taken to their ultimate perfection in needle-point lace.

BLACK WORK AND WHITE WORK

White work continued to change and develop as a living, fascinating branch of needlecraft during the 17th and 18th and early 19th centuries, but black work never again attained the grace and importance of those early splendours.

Some of the earliest domestic embroidery that remains today is mid-16th century black work. Incalculably more must have perished, for much was on the thin cambric and lighter lawn of ruff and cuff, never designed for long wear, and the silk itself suffered from the effect of its black dye. One can only guess at the early splendour of the work, from Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, for instance:

White was her smocke, embrouded all before
And eke behynde, on her colar aboute,
Of cole blacke sylke, within and eke without . . .

Obviously Catherine of Aragon is no longer credited with the introduction of black work upon her first marriage in 1501, but Spanish fashions at court undoubtedly fostered the style and many Englishwomen must have noted and copied her personal choice of household linen, her sheets and pillow beres "wrought with Spanish work of black silk upon the edges". Henry VIII received gifts of holland shirts wrought in black silk: in the National Portrait Gallery one can see the black oak leaves and gilded acorns of a typical shirt. Black silk work including an edge of double blanket stitch has been noted on a neck frill worn by Edward VI. This was essentially silk embroidery, but the line stitching made the most of each ounce. At that time "black Spanish silk" might cost 1s. 4d. to 1s. 6d. an ounce. It was appraised at 1s. 3d. in a Darlington inventory of 1592. There is some indication that black work and Spanish work in old records are not synonymous, but the two words are most frequently used together in old records.

By Elizabeth's reign the fashion was widespread and may be noted in portraits of the queen in the early, middle and late years of her reign. Elizabethan shirts may be embroidered in this way at neck and cuffs, including deep front panels, in the last quarter of the 16th century, and the engaging patterns coil themselves over men's and women's

waistcoats, their caps and coifs and hoods. Lovely examples remain of household linen.

Black work obviously was derived from Arabic work in Spain of the 14th century. Early specimens consist mainly of double running stitch, which now is sometimes known as Holbein stitch because associated with his portraits and observed in the formal "arabesques" and geometrical approach. Even when the major design developed foliage outlines there might be beautifully worked formal diaper patterns to fill in the leaves and contribute to the lace-like daintiness of the work. Variation in texture soon developed, with coral stitch, satin stitch, buttonholing and so on, just as the early emphatic scrolls soon acquired more naturalistic motifs and themselves became less dominant. As the motifs became more diverse there was still some interest in geometrical pattern prompted by the on-coming drawn and cut work, but a more general liking for the queer and freakish. More immediately, the designs testify to the new-found delight in books with wood-cut illustrations, clear but crude enough, with outlines easily copied in stem, back, chain and double running stitches and with shading little finer than the embroiderer's effective coral stitch and speckling. The stitches associated with black work also include herringboning, closely worked for substantial stems and more openly for effects of shading. An interesting use of this stitch has been noted by J. L. Nevinson among Lord Middleton's embroideries: some details of the repetitive design have been worked from the front producing the usual plaited effect and other details from the reverse which, on the front, appear as narrow parallel lines. Thus each side of the cover has a neat, varied pattern, suitable for a dressing table cover. A closely pleated ruff, too, required any embroidery to appear equally perfect on both sides. The portrait of Sir Edward Hoby at Bisham Abbey (1578) (Fig. 11) shows a delightful spot pattern of tiny hearts and triangles in such black work.

Sometimes one finds the work executed in red silk instead of black, sometimes in green, and references abound to the quality and popularity of the blue thread of Coventry, but the monochrome book print is the obvious source, although

not usually a pattern book. Wallpapers and lining papers of the late 16th century, also printed from wood blocks, offered further possibilities for the home pattern maker. These papers for lining 16th- and 17th-century chests, desk sand the like are remarkably varied in floral, heraldic and formalistic designs. Some show diaper patterns, others English birds and butterflies and others detached devices and somewhat ponderous mottoes.

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, possesses many examples of men's caps and women's coifs with these coiling designs, the stems often in silver-gilt, the flowers outlined in black—roses, pansies, honeysuckle, comfrey and all the familiar charm and sweetness of the period's garden knots and herberies. These date to the later 16th and early 17th centuries.

A woman's sleeved bodice of the late 16th century in this Museum contains a more intriguing assortment of motifs ranging from goat and peacock to a child on a crocodile holding snakes. But here again the source is obviously literary: three of the motifs have been traced to G. Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes*, 1586, and all may have come, as his probably did, from an earlier volume.

The fashion for this pen-drawing embroidery, lit only with gilded threads and a sprinkling of spangles, continued well into the 17th century, not only, as might be expected, on the deep hoods often worn by widows but on household linens. Some remaining specimens have been worked on linen for mounting on hangings. The Naworth accounts for 1633 refer to the sewing of a pillow bere and to the black silk and paper required.

Monochrome embroidery in black never entirely disappeared but it never regained its early brilliance. Eighteenth and early nineteenth century samplers are to be found wholly in black, including some extremely lengthy verses, such as one in the National Museum of Wales dated 1834, the letters worked in cross, four-sided and eyelet stitches; others are in red. Maps are often in black (see Chapter 12) and contemporaneous with these in the later 18th century was a vogue for small pictures finely stitched to reproduce as exactly as possible the prints they copied (see Chapter 6).

Black work in its 16th and 17th century heyday was essentially a surface-covering embroidery, a practical method of reinforcing shirt front and pillow bere against the rub of wear, and even more of masking spots and stains in days when these must have presented truly prodigious problems to the fastidious. The needlewoman's concern, therefore, was to avoid a sense of weightiness. On substantial tunic or waistcoat this mattered less and on cap and coif gilded thread and spangles and gold lace were introduced freely, but a more interesting alternative consisted of combining the black embroidery with a technique more usually associated with white work: "... To overcasting and edging six smocks of drawn work with ruffs, waistbands and collars, three of them with black work and three of them with red ..." (1558); "... drawing and working with black silk drawn work five smocks of fine holland cloth ..." (1600).

The Victoria and Albert Museum collection includes pillow beres and also a long cover 7 ft. 3 in. $\times$ 2 ft. 8 in. with a full rich pattern of vine leaves, tendrils and fruit. In these the handsome leaves are lightened and the whole pattern transformed by the clever use of the formal chequer diaper patterns associated with drawn work instead of conventional veining. This is not drawn and cut work but is a particularly fine example of the way one technique was usurping the other.

The delicacy of this work may be appreciated when it is compared with the formalised repetitive fruiting vine motif on an Elizabethan coif in the same Museum, with stylised roses instead of leaves. This is worked in white linen and silver gilt and presents an interesting exercise in drawn and cut work with the practical advantages of ventilation, but the grace is lacking.

White work is too intimately associated with plain sewing for old records to give it much mention. Narrow loom widths of linen for every purpose of home and dress had to be seamed and hemmed. An inch or more of flat openwork stitchery between each width was not only more ornamental but it also made the most of the fabric and minimised uncomfortable ridges. The pillow beres referred to above

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are edged with buttonholing and still show traces of the open herringbone stitchery that once joined front and back of each case. The loosely woven threads of early linen were essentially easy to separate and count: they could be gathered and whipped into groups forming open meshes, or threads could be withdrawn from one way of the fabric and the remaining threads grouped as for hemstitching. Once such counted thread stitchery was appreciated as ornament, the possibilities became endless and it has always been associated with the flax-growing countries. One obvious development was the creation of a plain square or rectangular net basis by the time-old fishing net method, and using this for building patterns in more solid white with in-and-out darning stitches. This darned netting is usually known by its French name of *lakis*. It had offered the early churches obvious opportunities for clear simple depiction of religious stories on altar cloth and the like. St. Paul's Cathedral had a cushion of network in 1295 and in 1327 Exeter Cathedral recorded three pieces of darned netting for use at the altar. Conway Church has an altar cover recorded in its possession for over 400 years. But it is evident that the darned netting had far wider domestic uses. Mary Queen of Scots's inventory (1587) lists furniture—that is, the soft furnishings—for a bed of network; and a remaining specimen at Peterborough Museum is traditionally her own handiwork, a pelican similar to one in the famous Vinciolo second pattern book (Chapter 19) but possibly from an earlier book by Quentell. This, typically, is darned into a square of the netting. Mrs. Bury Palliser quotes a reference in the *Ballad of Hardyknute* to such square insertions:

An apron set with many a dice
Of Needlework sae rare . . .

Probably this was the white work on the cushion cloth given by Lady Chandos to Queen Elizabeth in 1589, worked with flower slips and trees. Ten years before her present to the queen had been "a vail of black net work flourished with flowers of silver". A development of this work occurred in the 19th century, sometimes known as *guipure d'art*, at a

time when net could be made cheaply by machinery and was much used for white work.

John Skelton's familiar verse (1523) refers to lacis as well as to samplers; and the 17th century poet John Taylor's equally familiar praise of the needle includes network in the list of embroideries. Probably it figured among the pictorial insertions introduced by women then absorbed in religious matters, who were ridiculed at this time for transferring the pictorial motifs associated with church vestments to their husbands' apparel:

Sure you should not be
Without a neat historical shirt

(Beaumont and Fletcher, *Custom of the Country*, 1625).

Mrs. R. E. Head has drawn attention to the period's strange white work variant of raised or stump work, a rare find for a collector today. This follows even more closely the current pictorial style, showing richly clad royalty standing under detached canopies, but the whole small picture is built up in needlepoint lace stitchery on a basis of stretched linen threads. The petals of background flowers, the clouds half over the sun, the borders of dresses, the figures' arms, even their eyelids over tiny beady eyes, are detached at the edges and slightly raised and in this way achieve much bolder shadows than might be expected otherwise of what is basically fine white buttonhole stitching.

A more interesting reference in Taylor's poem, however, is to frost work. This, surely, is the perfect name for the main development of white work throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, as monochrome surface embroidery gradually gave way to drawn work, stimulated by the improved thread of the later 16th century, and the ultimate delicacy of cut work and fabric-less needlepoint lace. Drawn work, as indicated above, left a basis of threads on which to form the ornament with needle and thread: in cut work the entire filling had to be of stitchery, the cloth being cut away.

Needlepoint lace is outside the scope of this book but perhaps it may be well to explain that it is created with a needle and a single continuous thread, using a familiar buttonhole stitch. The lighter, cheaper bobbin lace differs

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in that numerous threads are used and, for ease of handling, are wound upon bobbins, the patterns being created by twistings of the threads. This is almost always easily distinguished from the needlepoint method. Since early in the 19th century, of course, these laces have been ousted to a very large extent by machine-made lace and net.

Taylor refers to cut work as an Italian rarity but perhaps means needlepoint lace. By Henry VIII's reign there are references to its use in England. Mrs. Bury Palliser quotes a description of a wealthy Newbury clothier's widow "having a white cap upon her head, with cuts of curious needlework, the same an apron, white as the driven snow". Certainly in Elizabethan times much cut work was imported, some from Italy, some from Flanders. Various import-prohibiting laws were enacted during the 16th and 17th centuries which included various categories of embroideries, purls, cut works, bone laces, but whether they helped the English craft or merely prompted the fashion for exclusive foreign work is hard to determine.

In Mary's reign, for example, the wearing of ruffles made out of England, "commonly called cutwork", was forbidden to those under the degree of baron, and to women below the rank of knight's wife were forbidden "white works alias cut works, etc., made beyond the sea". But obviously this would be of no concern to the great of the land whose records are plentiful.

Elizabeth I herself wore and used cut work abundantly, much received as gifts: in 1584 she paid 54s. 4d. for one yard of double Italian cutwork, a quarter of a yard wide, and in 1586 bought six yards good ruff lawn well worked with cut work and edged with good white lace for 60s. Indeed most of the references to cut work in the late 16th and early 17th centuries concern the ruffs that Stubbes describes so fulsomely "... some are wrought with open work down to the middle of the ruff and farther . . . and other gewgawes . . . as the ruff is the least parte of itself. . . ." Dress records of the period must be viewed with some caution, however. The term cut might equally imply the slashed and pinked effect beloved of those who wished to parade their rich disregard for gorgeous fabric.

Similar confusion may arise from the period's continued use of the terms lace and laced for braided work; of points for the tags and ribbons that speckled 17th-century clothing rather than for point lace; and of bands for the linen and lawn collars that were important alternatives to the more flamboyant ruffs. It is obvious, however, that embroidered cut work was used largely on the shifts or chemises of the day, showing at the neck like men's shirts, and through the tunic slashings. These were often still known by their Saxon name of smocks, as in the "smocks seamed through with cutworks" in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Four Plays in One* (1647).

A child's late 16th century shirt sleeve at the Victoria and Albert Museum must be typical of much of this work, the coiling tendrils worked in chain stitch to enclose roses and buds with cut work centres, worked in the customary manner with edges of buttonholing and fillings of needlepoint lace. Portraits show exquisite specimens on aprons (see Chapter 18), long, wide and extremely delicate, often composed of several widths of fabric and sometimes entirely of bands of cut work and edgings of lace. The anonymous portrait of Margaret Laton in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows part of a beautiful apron (Fig. 40).

The ultimate in these is the apron wholly of lace to be noted frequently at the end of the 17th century—perfected frost work. Household linen is to be noted too, such as the cushion cloths that rich ladies were forever presenting to each other, and table cloths such as that shown on the toilet table in the portrait of Frances Countess of Essex in the collection of the Duke of Portland, K.G. (Fig. 44). Remaining Elizabethan specimens show surface embroideries combined with the needlepoint lace fillings, such as outlines of chain stitch—worked of course in linen thread, for cotton thread was an 18th-century introduction.

Some of the most interesting detail is found on samplers. These are mainly of the 17th century (a 19th-century specimen has been noted) but one in the London Museum bears Queen Elizabeth's coat of arms (Fig. 30). Dated specimens most usually belong to the early Restoration years, such as Elizabeth Wood's dated 1666, at the Victoria and Albert

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Museum. This has a surface-embroidered alphabet, drawn work with darning and overcast stitches, and cut work with needlepoint lace fillings. Some retain traces of the figure work associated with this period, such as one dated 1699 in the National Museum of Wales. Many samplers indicate clearly enough that English women were highly skilled in this exquisite embroidery, but it was common to all Europe at this time and the high prices of recorded specimens often suggest imported work. William III set a spectacular example with his purchases of cut work, such as trimming for twelve handkerchiefs, 117 yards, costing £485 14s. 3d.

A sampler at the Victoria and Albert Museum dated 1696 has many rows worked with more formal designs in satin stitch, as well as buttonholing, eyelet hole work and needlepoint lace fillings, and the importance of surface embroidery in white work at this period must not be overlooked. Samplers make it clear that linen marking was becoming usual. As early as 1579-80 the Pewterers' Company paid 8s. to have five dozen napkins hemmed and marked and the practice increased among the vast stocks of plain and diapered linen expected in a well-found home.

Other surface embroidery in white linen is associated with dress, especially in use with quilting. There is, for example, the man's doublet of the late 1630s at the same museum, all in white, the pairs of hearts in the quilted pattern suggesting a wedding suit and greatly enriched by the additional textural interest of the white couched work and French knots (Fig. 25). The later 17th century, and much of the 18th, saw quilting immensely popular and the same appreciation of surface texture subtleties is to be observed in elaborately designed, finely worked white embroidery, even including the white embroidered buttons that some collectors search out. These buttons are worth more than passing mention. The ribbons and tying laces and hooks and eyes of Elizabethan days might be replaced in Restoration England by the acorn-shaped buttons used as ornament on handkerchief and cushion with threads worked over wooden moulds.

In the 18th century these knopped buttons were rivalled by more practical flat buttons, for fabric buttons to match

a man's coat or waistcoat were made illegal from Anne's reign and onwards to help the makers of metal buttons. The thread still radiated from the centre, as in the acorn, but might be stitched over a brass ring. Many are decorative, some bright with silk and spangles in days when men paid highly for buttons of cut steel or painted enamels. Criss-cross patterns went by the name of death's heads; there were interlaced basket buttons, too, and others speckled with French knots and known as snails. Dr. C. Willett Cunnington has noted an *Ipswich Journal* reference to white snail buttons dated 1741. He dates the introduction of the flat calico button on a brass ring to the 1840s.

Bodices are to be noted, and pockets, and petticoats with scrolling flower patterns as elaborate as any on the familiar quilted ones but worked out in a multitude of the solid surface-covering stitches required for impressive display. Padded satin stitch and back stitch may be worked in close imitation of Italian quilting. Satin stitch may be supplemented by couching, French knots, raised buttonhole stitch often worked over thin cord for greater emphasis so that every stem and leaf and flower is a complexity of surface ornament, heightened perhaps by the contrasting texture of drawn work, like a matted background to a design in metal engraving.

Patterns appear in the rich rococo manner of their time, or with more or less Oriental motifs. Delightful home white work for babies remains from the 18th century, such as shirts and especially the baby caps that would receive less hard usage than other garments, and treasured christening robes. Much was worked on good quality cotton, some on linen and late in the century there was a vogue for muslins.

The particular form of white embroidery known as hollie work is associated with 18th-century baby clothes—a faint echo of needlepoint lace, wholly lacking its grace but forming serviceable, ventilated insertions and open seams. Unfinished samplers are sometimes found that indicate the method of working. Circles and bands cut out of the fabric were edged with buttonholing as a preliminary to filling with rows of a twisted buttonhole stitch worked from left to right upon the thread brought back from the previous

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row. Sometimes the fabric's horizontal threads were left and the stitch worked upon these. Pattern was achieved with this work by missing stitches: stars, hearts, crowns, flowers, the Annunciation lily-pot design and formal diamond patterns appear as pin pricks in the even white ground, reminiscent of that curious, unambitious pastime of "pin-pricking" pictures. The shoulder seams of small shirts have been noted, bearing initials and dates.

Much baby wear was embroidered commercially in fine white cotton during the late 18th century and throughout the 19th, some bonnets being attractively ornamented with padded satin stitch and eyelet holes, and sometimes cut work too, the patterns simple but well composed. Machine-made net remained coolly ventilated even when simply and delightfully embroidered all over with solid little flowers. Very many thousands of cottage women in Scotland and Ireland were employed on commercial white work up to the mid-19th century. It offered employment when home spinning failed them, however poorly paid.

Broderie Anglaise, too, shows practical ventilation transformed into delicate patterning on baby clothes, house linen, the close sleeves known to early Victorians as *engageantes*, and the slender cambric petticoats of the Regency and the more bulky ones that followed, though these were but glimpsed occasionally and no longer displayed, and only the outermost was decorated. This form of work came into fashion in the late 18th century and was still in use a hundred years later, the patterns formed of small holes run round with soft cotton closely overcast (and preferably washed before any fabric was cut away). A pricking wheel might be used to ensure regularity. It was wearisome to work and easily imitated by machines which largely took over in the early 19th century. The comparable richelieu work presents the opposite effect, with the ornamental motifs in solid whiteness and the background cut away, criss-crossed where necessary with the decorative bars or *brides* of lace work.

Much of the lovely white work associated with this period is stitched on the filmy muslins made in England and Scotland during the last quarter of the 18th century. Lace had little place on the simple dress of the French revolution

period and the classical 1800s. The craze could scarcely be expected to last with gowns so flimsy that they were liable to be crushed by any outdoor wear heavier than a light embroidered pelisse. Nevertheless muslin gowns worn over white satin, muslin scarves, collars and big, long dress aprons may be noted with delicate drawn and cut work, with shadow effects in chain stitch in thick cotton and with satin stitch for surface contrast. Some muslin work was copied in India. Patterns may be identified in the ladies' magazines of the 1790s and 1800s but are mainly the obvious baskets of flowers, ribbon and tassel devices and geometrical motifs. Some designers advertised paper patterns specifically for muslin work and from this period many more appeared suitable for *Broderie Anglaise*.

Net, machine-made at threepence a yard, was in general use by the 1820s, the machine invented in 1809. Worked on with a tambour hook instead of a needle, quick results could be produced resembling chain stitch embroidery. This is scarcely to be regarded as needlework perhaps but it closely intermingled with the other white and coloured commercial embroidery of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The name comes merely from the round hoops fitting inside each other that held the net stretched taut between them. The pattern was drawn on the net and run over with the little hook with flax thread, cotton or shiny untwisted silk. But here again the factory soon stole the work from the cottage, and as early as 1810 Maria Edgeworth wrote of receiving "a curiosity—a worked muslin cap that cost 6*d.*, done in tambour stitch by a steam-engine". Tambour work was used widely, too, in the 18th century for coloured ornament on strong satin and taffeta. Much was applied to shawls in attempts to rival the wonderful woven patterns of Kashmir before Paisley developed elaborate woven Oriental designs in the 1840s. To make a stitch the worker pushed the hook into the fabric from above and drew out a loop of sewing silk which she was holding under the fabric over the first finger of her left hand.

Sometimes in white embroidery the muslin has been worked to resemble lace. A man's sleeve cuff has been noted showing the royal arms with lion and unicorn supporters.



C. Part of a mid-17th-century picture worked in wool and silk on linen canvas mainly in tent stitch with the angels' hair in silk purl. The whole panel measures 3 ft. 7 in. $\times$ 1 ft. 10 in., taken from the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac. Here Abraham is entertaining the three angels while Sarah stands at the door. Above in the background are Hagar and the child Ishmael. Many of the filling details appear frequently on embroideries of the

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The so-called Carrickmacross appliqué lace introduced in about 1820 consists of patterns cut out in thin cambric and whipped on to net, with charming little fillings of needlepoint lace. This was followed by the so-called guipure, the patterns cut out in cambric and linked not by net but by bars stitched as in needlepoint lace. Eyelet holes often form the groundwork of this slow and tedious stitchery. The Limerick laces of the 1830s are net treatments, too, the patterns put in with a tambour hook at first but later with running stitches, and graceful effects were achieved with lace fillings, but such work is not peculiar to Ireland. In any case, by 1840 at least, machine-made lace was putting an end to the value of hand "imitations", although in the 1860s tambour, guipure, appliqué and heavy crochet "laces" were still being worked.

Another Irish development was Mount Mellick work, started in the 1830s but associated especially with the last years of the century when many patterns were available for naturalistic flower sprays and the like in raised effects achieved with white knitting cotton on strong white satin.

It is interesting to note the swing of fashion from tambour work to sewed white embroideries towards the 1850s, when the annual turnover in white work was calculated at more than three quarters of a million pounds, and the United States alone took a third of this each year, although few women in their cottages earned as much as ten shillings a week. In Ulster and the west of Ireland advertisements sought girls by the thousand, but offered only sixpence a week to beginners.

Lithographed patterns were introduced in about 1837 instead of costly wood blocks and this gave a considerable fillip to commercial white work. Even after the mid-century critics were deploring the fact that girls spent years at ornamental white work yet could not make the simplest clothes for themselves or shirts for their menfolk. By far the most distinguished work produced by cottagers for their own families was the smocking on garments that exactly met their wearers' needs. This is considered among other clothing in Chapter 16.

Chapter Six

PICTORIAL EMBROIDERY

LIKE children's fairy tales, pictorial embroidery is due for a revival. From the earliest days of needlework's recorded history in this country the quiet orderliness of this persuasive craft has been linked with imaginative story-telling fantasy—the homely, down-to-earth, factual presentation of the wildest impossibilities, with endless diversions to indulge each minor whim of passing fancy, which child and needlewoman appreciate. Good stitchery, like a good fairy tale, can leave nothing vague: only when an attempt is made to lose its individuality in a disorderly blur does pictorial needlework become tiresome.

If all good needlecraft stems from necessity—quilting, smocking, seam linking and the rest—and thus possesses the beauty of the basically functional, then pictorial embroidery is the extra touch that expresses the worker's joy in the making. Other countries have perfected certain formal embroidery styles, such as Denmark's hedebo fillings. But the first embroidery that won Continental fame for this country, *opus Anglicanum*, included much pictorial work that has preserved its individuality to this day. At first glance this work might suggest only the disciplined formality of stained-glass church windows, the characteristics of all Gothic figure ornament, and the work is judged for effective grouping, rhythmic design, masterly stitchcraft. But always the embroiderer's own personality tended to take charge of the needle. The reverent recording of sacred history has become as humanly pictorial as the language of the Bible itself. The story of the Nativity on an early 14th-century velvet band at the Victoria and Albert Museum suddenly becomes alive where the embroiderer has depicted

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one of the Bethlehem shepherds playing his bagpipes and his dog raising its head in a howl.

Such an approach to the embroiderer's craft, such indulgence of chance fancies, long remained characteristic of English pictorial needlework. Over two hundred years later an embroiderer could still record his or her passing amusement at another dog, on the famous Bradford table carpet, working in the animal's frustrated tail end as it struggles down a rabbit hole, and completing the story by showing the rabbit emerging unconcernedly from another hole nearby.

By the late 16th century the exacting split stitch of *opus Anglicanum* had been superseded, but only by the fine tapestry effects of tent stitch, with each thread-crossing of the woven linen canvas individually covered by precise stitchery, commonly with as many as 400 stitches to the square inch and sometimes four times that number. By the mid-17th century pictorial embroidery had become an unruly game, but not until Georgian days did the actual quality of the execution tend to suffer severely and with it the imaginative life of such work. Then, unfortunately, even Watteau-inspired idylls came to lack all traces of his haunting awareness of reality—the fairy tale becoming little more than its happy ending.

Even then the pictorial approach to embroidery continued, however, finding expression in ever-changing techniques. Even the Devonshire lace women, when their once-exquisite craft reached its lowest 19th-century ebb, instinctively sought some pictorial interpretation for the meaningless shapes ordered by the lace factor, dubbing them turkey cocks, frying pans and the like. The techniques in which pictorial embroideries were worked out tended to become ever simpler, but the results retained the charm of indigenous work. Within their limits even those 19th-century scenes in cross stitch and beads, when not overwhelmingly ambitious, are often fresher, livelier and more meticulously executed than has been admitted in the recent past.

Today needlewomen look mainly in museums and great houses for the richly peopled tent stitch pictures of the 16th-century valance and cushion and table carpet, or for the

dress-conscious schoolgirl creations of Stuart days. But it is still comparatively easy to find some of the many 18th-century successors. A good set of 18th-century silk pictures may yet cost many guineas but a small piece of 19th-century woolwork may sell for less than a pound.

Some would argue that the decline in the technique of pictorial embroidery began in the 14th century. The renowned Bayeux "tapestry" is fascinating as a vivid, humour-touched story of the late 11th century, but too crude and naïvely designed to be compared with the church vestments which by the 13th century had made *opus Anglicanum* famous throughout Europe. On cope and orphrey and chasuble the split stitch especially associated with this work gave almost the effect of bas relief modelling to the faces of the elongated, stylised but utterly real figures in their delicately elaborate settings. The figures and scenes of the Tree of Jesse orphrey (Victoria and Albert Museum) are typical of this work, which was as pictorial as stained glass but quickened with intensely human life.

Some of these embroideries were worked by nuns and monks, some by such lay embroiderers as the Mabel of Bury St. Edmunds who is on record for having earned £10 in 1239 for making a chasuble and offertory veil for the king. Inevitably, however, professional success led to a loss of individuality in such work. Hastier applied motifs and more mechanical couched work and ugly conventions of raised detail for eye and nose characterised the later 14th- and 15th-century products and hastier, less meticulous satin stitch where formerly only split stitch had appeared fine enough to express each contributory detail.

When pictorial embroidery came into its own again in Elizabethan days the whole approach had changed. Expensive foreign tapestries covering the mansion were direct inspiration to the lady of the house, and to the employee who kept them in repair, to create perfectly two-dimensional, entirely regular, uniformly stitched yet far more vividly topical pictures in tent stitch. It has been suggested that needlework intended specifically as pictures was a 17th-century innovation. In rooms hung with arras or painted to suggest such hangings no wall pictures were required.

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There is occasional 16th-century reference specifically to an embroidered picture but in the main the period's magnificent pictorial embroideries were the practical work used by the rich and houseproud to strengthen and adorn the fabrics they lavished on beds, chairs, tables and the like in those colour-excited days.

"Ane bed of crammoisie velvet maid in broderie work and leiffes of gold with sum histories maid in the figure ovail" was included among the queen's movables in 1561. This would probably be in tent stitch, very likely mainly in wool with costly foreign silks to give touches of light. "One border of a story of Herod presenting Christ and the children in Jury, 155." was listed among the possessions of Marion Chapman of Newcastle in 1583.

Later generations have tended to confuse some of this work with woven tapestry, and the misnaming of tent stitch and cross stitch as tapestry work continues to this day. Thus Lady Jerningham in 1805 described to Lady Bedingfield a present from the king to Lord Harcourt: "It is a piece of large Tapestry worked by Mary Queen of Scotland: the gold that is interwoven with the Tapestry is worn; the figures (for it is a group of figures) are her own invention or a copy of a picture, but L^d Harcourt thinks that she Invented the whole. It is supposed to be the Virgin Mary giving her Blessing to a little Boy which is supposed to be James I . . ."

Cushions of this period, too, bring evidence of the intense delight in pictorial story telling associated with Elizabethan embroideries (see Chapter 10). Typical was the way in which the embroidery, in the tapestry tradition, entirely covered the ground of coarse linen canvas, the stitches restricted to tent stitch and cross stitch often of the long-armed variety. A favourite basis for the design was a series of small, dark-edged hillocks receding to a cloud-flecked sky, every hillock with its more or less isolated figure, human or animal, its bird or flower, insect or stumpy, representational tree whose size was dictated merely by the amount of space to be filled. Even the skyline had its windmills and castles and Gothic houses and the sky itself its bright-faced, lavishly nimbused sun among puffy cushions

of cloud. All this typified the normal basic design into which the embroiderer fashioned her own choice of theme, whether of Biblical story or some more general commentary on contemporary life such as is perfectly expressed in the borders of the Bradford table carpet (Fig. 14).

This particular late 16th-century specimen demands something more than passing reference. Worked in tent stitch, not in wool but in a wonderful range of coloured silks on linen canvas, it measures 13 feet by 5 feet 9 inches: that is, over $4\frac{1}{4}$ million stitches. The centre is in a repetitive design, but each border consists of a magnificent series of imaginative pictorial scenes portrayed in vivid detail. Here are an angler, and huntsmen on horse and foot, fowlers and richly dressed strollers, and between them and among them not only their extremely varied quarry and many prodigiously fruitful oaks, nut trees and giant rosebushes but also splendid moated palace and smaller homes, with church and windmill against the sky. Such details as a miller crossing the footbridge to his watermill, and his hound crouching to drink from the mill stream, are typical in their vivid naturalness: quaintness in such embroideries was a later development. At the same time an entirely distinct range of pictorial embroideries was created to decorate the period's linen pillow beres for daytime display, in Levantine silks, silver-gilt and silver threads in the wider range of stitches such materials suggest (see Chapter 9).

Often the embroidery was worked on separate material and applied to the ground: in large hangings such a method was particularly desirable as it allowed for renewal of the ground. Figure 11 shows a long cushion which is interesting as a transitional piece. This is in white satin, its motifs worked separately on linen canvas but still bound by the tent and cross stitch convention relieved only by couched metal thread. In this fascinating welter of unassociated details the skill of the overall design and the use of strong contrasts keeps the result from seeming overcrowded.

The collector of pictorial embroidery derives particular pleasure from the very naiveté of such specimens as the set of pillow beres from the Abingdon collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum: Figure 14 illustrates the story of Noah

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from this series of Old Testament tales worked with gold and silver thread and dark blue and crimson silks in a range of line stitches and fillings.

By the early 17th century, when purely decorative pictures in needlework were becoming established, such Biblical themes predominated, but as in contemporaneous stump work their range was surprisingly limited. Esther and Ahasuerus, the finding of Moses, Dives and Lazarus, were obvious choices offering every opportunity for lavish costuming—contemporary Stuart rather than ancient or eastern—to the stiff little figures in their usual hillocky country landscape settings. Jephthah may meet his daughter in a landscape where ducks on a distant lake are as large as the attendant servants and maidens; Solomon greeting the Queen of Sheba is every inch a Stuart king. The glitter of gold thread and spangles was much to the liking of the early 17th-century needlewoman. Dame Dorothy Selby who died in 1641 is described on her tomb at Ightham as a Dorcas

Whose Pen of Steele and Silken incke enroll'd
The Acts of Jonah in Records of Gold.

The story of Tobias, the Good Samaritan, Belshazzar's feast or the flight of Lot may sometimes be identified, and a few rarer classical subjects. Other pictures are obviously no more than their creators' chance arrangements of conversation pieces—glimpses not so much of the girls' own homes and clothes and pastimes as of those that filled their dreams.

The raised work of the years around 1650 now known as stump work has become so popular with collectors (see Chapter 13) that one tends to overlook the flat pictorial work of this period. Some might still be embroidered in tent stitch with no more than occasional touches in satin stitch, French knots and laid metal threads, and continued in their whole design the close association with tapestry work. Other embroideries still entirely covered the ground of the fabric with a variety of cushion stitches forming small diaper patterns: brick stitch was a favourite for large areas such as skies. The welter of unassociated detail filling the background of a mid-17th century picture and seen at its most distracting in stump work appears to be thrust to the

sides in many a later 17th-century piece, so that the main scene can be viewed more clearly, framed perhaps in a circle of purl or heavy bullion or a wreath of ribbons to separate it from the miscellany of flowers and creatures. Often the subject is the head or group that might be expected of a period delighting in expensive miniature portraits.

At the other extreme the Stuart period could produce professional pictorial embroideries lacking all spontaneity but highly accomplished such as the "Adoration of the Shepherds" (Fig. 15) taken from a Flemish oil painting probably by Martin de Vos. This is inscribed on the back "Edmund Harrison Imbroderer to King Charles made theis Anno Doni 1637". Harrison was an important professional of his day, embroiderer to James I and Charles I, and his methods are interesting to contrast with those of contemporaneous domestic needlewomen. All the figures in this piece are worked separately and applied to the ground, but without padding, the faces being in fine split stitch and the clothing principally in metal threads laid in close horizontal lines and couched with silk.

There has always been a tendency in considering old embroideries to stress the changes in taste and technique, but it is important to recognise the extent and duration of transitional work. As long as embroidery silks were expensive luxuries for professional and ecclesiastical use the ordinary domestic embroiderer tended to work in sadly perishable wools, and much of some early periods has thus been lost and the very stitches have seemed to disappear. By the beginning of the 18th century when one of the great vogues for chinoiserie was sweeping over England, silk embroidery lent itself to the daintier fantasies of Eastern work. Nevertheless it is certain that many more pictorial embroideries continued to be created in England in the Carolean style, in wools, well into the second quarter of the 18th century, often with no greater concession to current tastes than an occasional exotic bird flying over the country scene, or an unorthodox flower or two.

Portraits of royalty continued popular: some of the most effective are almost as simple as the contemporaneous delft ware plaque portraits, but by William III's reign extremely

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elaborate backgrounds were being introduced and with a new liking for Continental chequered tile effects. The particularly delightful embroidery showing the meeting of Rebekah and Eliezer (Fig. 16) is a noteworthy example of the transition period, retaining much of the spirit of, say, the Bradford table carpet, yet far removed from Stuart stump work versions of this popular subject and showing a new awareness of Levantine detail.

Here camels confront the essentially English homestead, squirrels and exotic birds share the same oak trees, with the main characters in somewhat Eastern costume and sheep already taking possession of the foreground. Yet contemporaneous with this is such a wholly 18th-century style of embroidery as the picture of George I and the Prince and Princess of Wales (Fig. 16) taken from the mezzotint by Simon. Here the general effect is achieved in a smooth, flat silken stitchery that took hold of English embroiderers with the introduction of Oriental fineries, when even the flowers turned into indeterminate exotics.

On furniture, however, the sturdy long-proved tent stitch and bolder cross stitch continued to be worked in sturdily English pastoral designs throughout the first fifty or sixty years of the 18th century. Flamboyant flowers may crowd the borders but the central panel on chair or card table, fire screen or candle sconce is frequently still an outdoor country group. Biblical scenes show somewhat Eastern costumes and in English groups kings and other royalties of the 17th century give place to less exalted figures.

A panel reputedly worked by Queen Anne in the Duchess of Wellington's collection shows the huge buildings of Blenheim against the sky and a delightful foreground scene of lovers surrounded by nymphs with flower wreaths and small gay cupids. Fruit gatherers were popular again, such as the group at Penshurst worked by Queen Anne's lady-in-waiting Lady Betty Sidney in 1719. Background detail often shows real observation of country scenes: a specimen in the Lady Lever Art Gallery even shows the period's loved "classic ruin". The foregrounds are often delightful, each small hummock outlined in a series of colour gradations and enclosing perhaps just two or three specimen flowers.

"A shepherdess worked in worsted" was instanced by Di Vernon as a symbol of orthodox femininity and throughout most of the 18th century such idyllic groups were frequent, as charming but as solidly matter-of-fact as the mid-century's elaborate pastoral balls and banquets. Addison of the *Spectator* tilts at such "pastoral poetesses" who "vent their fancy in Rural Landscips and place despairing Shepherds under silken Willows, or drown them in a stream of Mohair", although he welcomes the fact that "it takes them off the scandal".

This pastoral mood is associated especially with France, but it must be remembered that from the 1750s onwards England was far ahead in the manufacture of pictorial printed cottons, produced in outline with copper plates and coloured in with wood blocks, an obvious source of assistance for the embroiderer. Obviously many designs, too, were amateur efforts. The wife of the etcher Thomas Worlidge (died 1766) was sufficiently renowned as both artist and needlewoman to be described at length in the *Public Advertiser*:

I hardly could believe my eyes
To see hills, houses, steeples rise;
While crewel o'er the canvas drawn
Became a river or a lawn.

Sources of design at this period were limitless, however (see Chapter 19). The mixture of motifs which might be associated even on the upholsteries of a set of chairs is indicated by a contemporaneous reference to some "taken from Mrs. Carrs at the late fire at Kensington" in 1727. These were described as "six tent-stitched chairs, two of them having a garden in the middle with trees in tubs, a Parrot in the trees eating cherries; two other of them with a Monkey and a Tyger; and the other two a Danish dog and cat. The borders of all of these of one pattern, being all sorts of flowers tied with ribbons in four places." One is reminded of fable illustrations and similar tapestry furniture coverings, but there were many alternative sources: the main requirement was an abundance of bright colour. "The more colours is worked in the finer and richer it looks," as Mrs. Legh of Lyme Hall declared of a chair covering.

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Many prints not specifically intended for the purpose found their way on to canvas and sarsenet. Later in the century while some leisured young ladies were laboriously rubbing the paper from the backs of prints mounted on glass, others were still more painstakingly reproducing each detail in fine black floss silk on thin sarsenet, even sacrificing their great heritage of colour to achieve more exact resemblance to the originals. This was known as print work, the tiny stitches seeking to reproduce the dots of the mezzotint.

Sylas Neville, travelling in the Newmarket area in 1783, commented in his *Diary* on "a charming piece of needlework. It represents a view upon a Lake near Berne, has all the appearance of the finest engraving is done upon sarsenet with black silk. The stitches are minute to a degree. The ladies say that it is the finest thing they ever saw. It is superior to the imitations of pictures in needlework by the Dean's Lady which we saw on Tuesday. Some of the latter, however, have great merit, particularly the small piece of dead game." Engravings and prints continued in favour among these needlewomen until the 1850s, despite the easy attractions of cross stitch. A view of Lincoln Cathedral in this black and white style was considered worthy of exhibition as late as 1851. Modern copies are to be found too, often on corded silk. Some small sentimental keepsakes such as watch backs were worked in hair, but much the same springy effect was often achieved with unravelled piece silk. A small landscape worked in hair is a rarer discovery, in the full colour range from blond to dark brown; an alternative is the introduction of lighter detail in hair upon a landscape in black silk.

Other embroiderers made use of prepared white silk or sarsenet with the outlines traced or printed and much of the finer detail painted in water colour by the artist-pattern maker, either on the fabric or on paper gummed on. Even before the mid-18th century pattern drawers prepared and sold "different sorts of linens with the Proper silks and crewels for making them", and by the 1780s this reliance on prepared materials was widespread, the results appearing framed as wall pictures and on innumerable small pole screens and the like.

Subjects included every kind of homely rural scene with a strong bias towards the sentimental. Children are chubby and roguish; maidens idealised and mournful and addicted to carrying baskets of roses. With much of the silk fabric left unstitched, the sky painted and even such details as rocks and grass presented with chenille, the embroiderer could afford to stitch the languishing shepherdess's fashionable gown in close satin stitch or other flat work and lavish innumerable French knots upon the backs of her flock. The sentimentalities of Wheatley, the widely popular Bartolozzi prints, Angelica Kauffmann's winsome ladies and similar easily appreciated work provided endless material, and there were many versions of such subjects as Fame strewing flowers on Shakespeare's tomb, often poorly worked in worsted.

A subject that proved astonishingly popular and is often found in very indifferent stitchery represents Charlotte mourning at the tomb of Werther. Late Georgian romantics were fantastically moved by Goethe's sentimental novel *The Sorrows of Werther*, seeing the author in the hero's role, and the subject is found even on the period's jewellery with willows over the tomb weeping pearl tears.

Some pictures at this time are worked in darning stitches which might be regarded as samplers, or some samplers achieve the status of embroidered pictures deserving their frequent framing and display. Other pictures are found mainly in chenille and others again in applied work, some wholly in imitation of pictorial embroidery but with all the motifs in fabric, tinsel, ribbons and the stiff muslin known as aerophane, shaded with darning stitches.

The very fact that the 18th century saw such a decline in the whole status of pictorial embroidery and in the demands it made upon the skill and industry of the domestic embroiderer makes the other main trend of the later years the more surprising. When so great a proportion of all that was worth doing in the world of arts and crafts was condemned as unladylike and women were expected to plait straw or paint shells, it must have required very considerable determination and boundless self-confidence for such individuals as Mrs. Mary Knowles, Mary Linwood and Miss Morritt

of Rokeby to copy not prints but the most famous old master oil paintings in embroidery wools.

Even if today one tends to agree with Mrs. Thrale who seized upon Johnson's pompous description "sutile pictures" so as to interpret it as "futile pictures", the fact remains that at the time these women established themselves as phenomena. Mrs. Knowles (1733-1807) was a vivacious Quaker lady and something of a public figure. She won the esteem of George III and Queen Charlotte and worked an elaborate study of the king from the Zoffany portrait. Queen Mary found it of sufficient interest to associate it with another picture stitched by Mrs. Knowles eight years later—showing her at work upon the king's picture (Fig. 17).

Miss Linwood (1755-1845) managed to retain some of her tremendous reputation throughout her long life. She was received by the Empress of Russia, was author, composer, director of a girls' boarding school; she was presented to Napoleon and in Paris received the freedom of the city for her enterprise. Her well-known study of Napoleon was taken from a sketch she made there. The first of her exhibitions was held in 1787 and provoked *The Times* to declare the whole effect "almost magical". She was 75 when she completed her last and biggest picture. Admiration and envy she received in abundance but never sought to sell a picture. Among over sixty pictures she copied was Gainsborough's "Woodman in a Storm" only ten years before the original was destroyed by fire. This is in the Museum at Leicester, for Birmingham-born Miss Linwood was associated with Leicester throughout most of her life.

Nevertheless erratic long-and-short stitches in coloured worsteds proved a poor substitute for the liquid brushwork of a Rubens or the grace of a Gainsborough. The haphazard "needlepainting" that sought to reproduce the hurried strokes of the artist's brush continued on a minor scale. One finds an occasional intriguing piece where a needlewoman has experimented to broaden the scope of needlecraft, as for instance a singularly lively study of hares in Sir Geoffrey Keynes's collection, worked in the late 18th century by Mrs. Thomas Butts, from a design almost certainly made for his friend and patron by William Blake (Fig. 17).

One occasionally finds wool pictures of ships and other marine subjects embroidered by sailors. Sometimes the ships especially are finely worked, the old three-deckers still proudly in full sail but often showing the funnels and smoke that tell of conversion to steam. Collectors of painted "Bristol rollers" and transfer-printed Sunderland lustre mugs will recognise the style as part and parcel of the early 19th century, soon forgotten in the craze for the exact, counted stitchery of cross stitch in thick Berlin wool on machine-made canvas.

This work was essentially simple and demanded no more than prolonged application, its tedium relieved by the romantic nature of the pictures being reproduced (see Chapter 19). Even by the mid-century critics were suggesting that such embroideries served better as chair covers than framed as work of art and soon turned with relief to the pictures of the Morris school, designed by such artists as Burne-Jones. Nevertheless these pictures are part of the 19th-century scene, as confidently ambitious if as limited in scope as the contemporaneous tessellated marble table and Tunbridge ware portfolio. Many a poorly-educated, convention-fettered early Victorian girl must have derived immense pleasure from losing herself in a gorgeous scene from one of Scott's novels—thus continuing the age-old association between the discipline of the needle and cloud-castle fantasy.

Chapter Seven

BOOK COVERS

THIS subject is too important to be omitted from any survey of English domestic needlework, and certainly much too attractive. If today it seems an unnecessary labour to submit delicate stitchery and rich encrustations of seed pearls to the inevitable wear of a book cover it must be remembered that during the period here under review the most likely alternative was a substantial binding of leather, perhaps gilded, or possibly velvet studded with gold or jewels: until the 1770s a bookseller's stock would largely consist of sheets, to be bound to suit the individual customer's wishes. Perhaps the most curious feature of these embroideries is their virtual omission of any clue to author or title. The numbers that remain indicate the great increase in the individual possession of books in late Tudor and Stuart England, but their style suggests their highly personal nature.

The beginnings of this craft are linked with the refined beauties of *opus Anglicanum* and it flourished throughout the richest years of Elizabethan and Stuart splendour. But then, alas, it ended. Collectors can delight in observing fine specimens at the British Museum, for example, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the headquarters of the British and Foreign Bible Society. But they can less easily collect them. A comprehensive collection may cover bindings in linen, velvet and satin, including the double *dos-à-dos* binding for two books back to back. Some may be tied with tasselled ribbons and others clasped in metal. It will almost certainly include bags with drawstrings for carrying books, and the wrappers for keeping them dust free in chest or cupboard. Henry VIII's libraries list velvet-bound books in cases of wood and leather; in 1662 the Bishop of Durham ordered

black leather cases lined with green. There may be book markers and even book cushions.

A fascinating detail is a velvet chemise binding, the fabric at the base of the book gathered into a button or knop for attaching to the girdle or ribbon sash worn by the early Elizabethan and early Stuart woman to carry pomander or fan. Some embroidered books are extremely small for easy carrying. The smallest I have noted measures 3 in. $\times$ 2 in. Lady Jane Grey at her execution in 1553 had "a black velvet book hanging before her and another book in her hand open". Elizabeth I in 1582 received "a little book gold enamelled, garnished with smale diamondes and rubys, both claspes and all hanging at a chayne of gold".

The earliest known specimen is the Felbrigge Psalter, probably dating to the second half of the 14th century, owned and probably worked by a Suffolk nun, Anne de Felbrigge. The embroidery panels (remounted) are worked with once-bright silks on fine canvas which is completely covered by the wavy background of fine gold thread. The Annunciation and Crucifixion scenes in split stitch are comparable with *opus Anglicanum* of the period. But the development of the craft can be traced only from the reign of Henry VIII and most of the specimens that remain are Elizabethan or Stuart work. Henry VIII's wardrobe accounts include substantial payments to Rasmus an "armerer" for garnishing velvet-bound books, presumably with heraldic motifs.

Curiously, some of the earliest remaining specimens are associated with Elizabeth I herself. One, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is more interesting perhaps as an eleven-year-old's response to the friendship of her stepmother than for any great craftsmanship in the interlacing strap-work of chain stitch in metal threads showing the initials K P on each cover with corner pansy motifs on a blue ground. But in any case it must be noted that the Princess Elizabeth, in offering this as a new year gift to Katherine Parr, offered the MS as her own work *The Miroir or glasse of the synnefull soule* which she had translated "as well as the capacitie of my symple witte and small lerning could extend themselves": she made no reference to the cover.

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The same uncertainty pertains to the British Museum cover associated with the Princess containing her translations into Latin, French and Italian of prayers written by Katherine Parr. Here again the main theme is a central monogram and pansy ornament, far less interesting as needlework, perhaps, than a cover worked by Katherine Parr herself to Petrarch's *Opere Volgari*, published 1544, which, with the spine or back uncovered to show the original leather binding, has an amateurish air, but is an impressive example of a popular style of shield of arms emblazoned in their proper tinctures, typical of the early, most possessive phase of these covers. Here the queen's complicated arms in a wide range of rich stitchery are set off by a background of purple velvet. The scrolling arabesques couched in thin gold are typical of contemporary embroidery, but the supporters, a chained hound and a wyvern, have an amateur eagerness about them. All the main features were worked on linen and applied to the velvet. On the other hand it appears ludicrous to suggest that Elizabeth stitched the cover to the Bible presented to her in 1584, beautifully worked with silks, metal threads and seed pearls, its rose stalks and flowers including conventionalised Tudor roses found on many Elizabethan bindings. It would appear to be a mistake even to ascribe royal ownership to all the covers bearing the royal cypher. The substantial effect of laid metal work in some of these armorial covers strongly suggests professional work. The professional Edmund Harrison, embroiderer to James I, Charles I and Charles II, worked the binding for the Red Book of the Order of the Garter, costing £12 17s. 6d.

An early 16th-century work by Bede *De natura rerum* is bound apparently contemporaneously in red satin, with exquisite gold arabesques. Silk and damask, too, were sometimes chosen, but the most usual fabric in this century was velvet such as the book of prayers Mary I received from her chaplain in 1556 "covered with crymson vellat and garnished with silver and guilt". This fabric was best suited by the early couched and laid work in metal threads, cords and gimps, or by the applied work closely stitched on canvas that gave Elizabethans more opportunity for flower

ornament. Both styles tended to be crowded and thus offered all the greater wear resistance. The British and Foreign Bible Society has a late Elizabethan cover in tapestry suggesting an obvious model for home needlewomen. Paul Hentzner of Brandenburg visited the queen's library at Whitehall in 1598 and noted the books in many languages "all bound in velvet of different colours although chiefly red, with clasps of gold and silver; some having pearls and precious stones set in their binding". When Elizabeth I received a New Testament in red velvet with her arms upon it at Cambridge in 1578 the Vice-Chancellor was warned to ensure that the book had no "savour of spike [lavender]" such as bookbinders were wont to add to their books to make them smell pleasant.

Some of the most appealing today are the simple floral covers, challenging the rich tooling of leather with similar compartmented flower heads between the ridges of the spine and filling the corners with symmetrical patterns in thick, coiling stems, bearing familiar flowers and fruits and often, too, the small creatures then abounding in any flower embroidery.

Some have the rich formality of gilded leather, the roses Tudor symbols, the stalks couched into unnatural arabesques, the buds heavily padded and the whole design enriched with a border of flowers on a smaller scale, as on a Bible of 1577 covered in red velvet. But equally attractive because finely executed are the green velvet covers worked with satin appliqué, silks and gold cord on *De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae* (1572: in the British Museum) where deer disport themselves among growing plants, ferns and grasses, the rose is a spreading bush and the only border consists of the park palings that declare the whole design as a pun upon the name of its author, Archbishop Parker, who had his own workshops and staff for bookbinding. This was a presentation copy to Elizabeth I of the first book privately printed in England.

In the 17th century, when embroidered book covers no longer had to express personal ownership, pictorial subjects became usual, but some delightful flower work continued, such as the British Museum's *Horae Successivae* (1632), closely

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ornamented with the individual flower slips of the period. Charles I received books bound in crimson and purple velvet from his mother but lacked the delight in good bindings shared by James I and the young Prince Henry. The characteristic embroidered covers that were developed during the 17th century, however, are most close in feeling to the minor amateur embroidery now generally classed as stump work. Some book covers do in fact include figures and other motifs raised in deep relief, and far more share such features as the white parchment-like satin ground, the bright clutter of braid and purl and spangles and occasional peacock's feathers, the delicacy of flower petals, partly detached, worked in lace stitches and edged with fine wire, and the delight in figure subjects. As in stump work these tend to be Biblical.

Bibles and Prayer Books, frequently carried and much cherished, were obvious inspiration to the home embroiderer. But the resultant "Sacrifice of Isaac", or figures of Saul and David tend to be lifeless, and the many figures of Virtues sometimes almost ludicrous. Some are set against typical stump work backgrounds of country landscapes. Wisdom clutches a serpent and Peace a dove, or Hope leans on her anchor among flowers and giant snails and caterpillars, with castle and cottage, clouds and smiling sun behind her. These may be in the stump work range of stitches on white or spangled satin or more enduringly in tent stitch on canvas with a worked background often of silver thread.

The alternative as in other stump work is to restrict the pictorial detail to a central oval, flatly embroidered in satin or long-and-short stitch. This may be a portrait as in the binding to a copy of Bacon's *Essays* given to the Duke of Buckingham now in the Bodleian Library. The Duke's bust worked in small vertical stitches is richly surrounded by gilded arabesques. Such a treatment offers full scope for the leather worker's style of strapwork framing and is comparable with work of the period in silver and in wood. The corners, like the compartments of the back or spine, may be filled with flowers or, more interestingly, with the winged cherub heads found in the spandrels of a 17th-century clock

face: these may be noted, for example, on a Bible dated 1638 and on another at the British Museum worked with the crowned initials of James II. Spandrels and strap-work framing serve the obvious purpose of protecting the more vulnerable silk stitchery and are mainly worked in metal threads and cords padded into high relief.

Perhaps this association with briefly fashionable and then outmoded stump work accounts for the virtual disappearance of embroidered book covers after the 17th century. The latest I have noted was on a book of poems dated 1767, a presentation to David Garrick, weakly embroidered by the authoress on green silk with a chain stitch garlanded monogram in silver-gilt thread and a sequin border. The fashion continued somewhat later in France and some of the most ornate work comes from Italy and Holland, but this has every appearance of being professional. From the early 19th century some notebook and blotter covers remain, worked on velvet or flannel and often encrusted rather than embroidered, with substantial flowers and corn in ribbon work.

The bags for carrying books are mentioned in Chapter 18. They tend to be considerably deeper than the books, to allow for closing with the drawstring at the top without damaging the book corners. Here again ornament is often rich, but avoids high relief effects. As some concession to hard wear the background is often worked over in silver thread. Wrappers for packing and storing books vary from the spangled linen embroidered with flowers in silks and gold round a Bible of 1612 in the British Museum to the plain green baize used for the Duke of Buckingham's copy of Bacon's *Essays*.

Book markers are sometimes to be noted in these embroidered volumes. An early 17th-century example in the British Museum is worked to harmonise with the binding in silk and silver thread with silk tassels. A small roll or pad at the top kept this kind of marker in place. A Bible dated 1632 owned by the British and Foreign Bible Society, with cover motif of a pelican in her piety, has a delightful marker of plaited silk cords attached to the roll—twelve cords, each bearing the name of an Apostle. Markers of many coloured

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ribbons naturally appealed to the 17th century. Many book-markers date to the 19th century. Mid-Victorians delighted in working small cross stitch motifs on perforated card which was mounted on ribbon. Crowns were popular and other sampler motifs, flowers, crosses, tombstones and the like. Thus the lines "When you and I in glory meet, We'll cast our crowns at Jesu's feet" have an ornate crown in place of the word. Other bookmarks are in what the period knew as Breton work, details from the formalised peasant costume patterns worked out in economical surface-covering stitches such as satin and chain with coloured silks and metal threads.

Some book cushions remain, the majority with Biblical subjects. One at Knole worked in silk and gold thread on white satin bears a figure symbolical of the Church with chalice and crown in the centre surrounded by corner figures of Faith, Hope, Justice and Fortitude.

Chapter Eight

FURNITURE EMBROIDERY

ARTISTIC though its appeal may be, embroidery is essentially a craft, a matter of hand as well as eye, of techniques and tools as well as colours and textures. One is never more conscious of this fact than when considering the embroideries that enrich some of the finest English furniture as perfect and enduring complements to oak and walnut and mahogany. No genius for the design of such work can compensate for wayward stitchery. There can be no short cuts to achieve quick effects: like the wood carver or the silversmith the embroiderer has to give most meticulous care to the plainest areas of background. Like all fine craftsmen, too, she must work with a view to producing strength as well as beauty: she must, positively, prepare for the tests of endless, thoughtless wear, fully reconciled to the fact that this is the basic purpose of her stitches.

The wonder today is that, nevertheless, the museums and even more the homes of this country possess so much fine furniture embroidery of earlier generations. For the collector, of course, it presents peculiarly difficult problems of authenticity, for shabby chair cover or leaky buffet stool is an eyesore and a challenge to any housewife, and replacements tend to follow preceding patterns and even to be attached with the same old tasselled fringes and closely ranged brass-headed nails. But those to whom age is not the only criterion can derive endless delight from the sheer beauty of craftsmanship in many existing examples of earlier centuries and from the study of each generation's favourite methods.

Age in hand-woven, hand-embroidered fabrics is often very hard to judge, though a chair or stool repeatedly

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recovered will show the marks of earlier nailing. Fabrics genuinely time-faded may declare their original rich, full colours on the back or in turnings, and should not be confused with more recent renewals in deliberately faded-looking colours.

Inevitably the work of Tudor and Stuart craftsmanship is rare today but it is a mistake to assume in consequence that it was exceptional. Such valuable contemporaneous sources as wills and inventories present brilliant pictures of colourful stuffs to offset the heavy gloom of massive oak in low, ill-lit rooms. When Princess Mary gave her father Henry VIII a chair in 1543 its construction cost her £3 16s. 8d. but the embroidery for it £18. Beds and more particularly the fabric bed "furniture" took pride of place among the wealth-parading possessions, but by the later 16th century many "little chairs of needlework" too were to be found as well as stools in many homes and by the later 17th century the spate of pictorial needlework spread over mirror frames, toilet boxes, and all manner of fashionable furnishings, from wall sconce and firescreen to massive daybed and settee. Celia Fiennes noted at Windsor in Mary II's closet "hangings, chaires, stooles, and screen the same, all of satten done in worsteads, beasts, birds, ymages, and ffruits all wrought very ffinely by Queen Mary and her Maids of Honour".

The craft has been in and out of fashion ever since, and even today there are many needlewomen who derive deep satisfaction from following the styles and traditions of earlier times. The student's work is but to distinguish the designs, materials and stitches and, if that is possible, the intentions of the past embroiderers so that original work may be cherished and renewals may be in keeping with the furniture they adorn.

Remaining specimens of antique furniture are often misleading. State chairs, like state beds, have been inventoried, treasured, recorded in portraits. But they have tended to prompt the assumption that there was almost a total lack of more ordinary chairs in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. Stools there were in abundance, admittedly, but when the term back stool was applied to a chair matters were

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made confusing for the later investigator. Even in the mid-18th century Ince and Mayhew were restricting the term parlour chairs to those with wooden, pierced backs, and calling upholstered chairs back-stools. The term buffet stool, like buffet chair, was long used to designate the upholstered variety: as late as 1703 Lady Grisell Baillie specified an £18 overstuffed chair as a buffet easy chair.

Even before the end of the 16th century straight-backed joiner-made armchairs, piled with cushions, were augmented not only by the leather-backed chairs generally associated with the mid-17th century but by the throne-like X-chair. In this the legs, back and front, form two rounded X shapes and between them, on intersecting webbing, is slung a deeply cushioned seat. The back is fabric stretched between continuations of the back X-shape and the arms run from the tops of the front X to the back uprights. Little pommels of metal, later fabric-covered wood, decorate the top of back and arms. This style became more widely available in the 17th century, when it eventually gave place to the more familiar winged overstuffed chair. There are numerous contemporary references to more homely little chairs of needlework, covered in enduring tent stitch with its capacity for fine pictorial detail. Some in more vulnerable silks would become practically worthless frames when their covers disintegrated, but even on these the applied embroideries of their day, in isolated but closely grouped motifs, would provide considerable wear-resistance. The heavy fringe trimmings, too, took the rub of use, rivalled from the late 17th century by the broad braid or galon of silk or silk and metal.

Such embroidered chairs as have been preserved from this period tend to suggest sumptuous regal inspiration, such as the Penshurst Place chair and daybed in that most appealing late Stuart scroll and wing outline, with the pattern of the rose damask upholstery reiterated in the appliqué work over it in coloured silks and black velvet. Richly embroidered chairs are described in the Northampton inventory, 1614, including, for instance, one of white satin covered with running work and slips (sprays of flowers) with a silvered and painted frame valued at

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£3 5*s.* *od.*, and a little back-chair of cloth of gold embroidered with gold twist (15*s.*) listed at a period when the wide farthingale dresses in and out of fashion made single chairs important items, and long before the general development of occasional furniture.

Turkey work chair coverings, too, often appear in early Stuart documents and have proved exceptionally enduring. These are usually classed among furniture needlework though their making consisted of knotting wool into woven canvas by craftsmen with no knowledge of Levantine carpet making. Sometimes the formalised flower patterns associated with this work are surrounded by coarse cross stitch, suggesting amateur work. Sir Robert Sydney in 1602 referred to a Turkey carpet 16 feet long costing £27 sterling "but it is esteemed very fine and well worth the money". Turkey work 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ yards long, worked with the Earl's arms, was included in the Northampton inventory, specified as a foot carpet. Twenty-four chairs and two forms of turkey work were fitted out by "Mr. Alder, the upholster" for the Pewterers' Company in 1660 and another sixteen in 1671-72, for 13*s.* each.

By the later years of the 17th century caning was becoming a popular alternative to upholstery, still supplemented, of course, with loose cushions, but the tall back of a periwig chair covered in wool embroidery competed more brilliantly with the Oriental lacquers and English japannings of their day. Before the end of the century the needlewoman was undertaking the formidable task of the completely upholstered overstuffed winged sleeping chair, which remains one of the most satisfying chair designs and most rewarding to work in stitchery.

These, and the wholly upholstered single chairs of the early 18th century, were covered with splendidly bold, rich embroideries, as formal coats of arms and stiff flower vases gave place to more homely work. Some of the most impressive are flower patterns in the heavy style of old Dutch paintings, huge flower heads and feathery leaves massed together or grouped in the vase or basket favoured by early Georgian pattern makers, such as a basket group now in the Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford, worked by Eleanor Welby

in silk and wool, signed and dated 1722. Colours are warm and full—rusty reds, warm rose tones, indigo blues, deep olive greens, touches of white, often against deep yellow ochre backgrounds. Touches of silk may highlight the matt-surfaced wools.

A fascinating example of this style is at Nunwick, Northumberland. Lady Allgood, wife of Sir Lancelot Allgood, was a needlewoman of unbounded enthusiasm. A wonderful set of furniture was made in about 1750 for Nunwick, including settee, six chairs, stools, card tables, firescreens, and much of Lady Allgood's tent stitch and long-and-short stitch work for this remains. The chairs display to perfection her pattern of passion flowers, all curving petals and writhing stems and upswept leaves, the flowers so huge that three or four fill a chair back, with a few minor flowers behind. Even a pair of delicate mid-century pole screens reiterate the general design.

This work is peculiarly interesting because a portrait of Lady Allgood at Nunwick, painted about 1750, shows her holding one of her chair embroideries, though the artist has sadly lost the grace and vitality of the needlework itself—and probably, too, of Lady Allgood, who is still remembered for a tireless energy that prompted her to have a spinning wheel made to fit in her coach so that no time need be wasted on tedious journeys.

Some chairs in needlework of this period copied damask patterns. Others were in flame stitch, crewels frequently replacing the untwisted silk of the original Florentine work. Many formal patterns could be worked in this vertical stitch, such as zig-zags in closely related colours across the back and seat of the chair, a fashion revived in the vivid Berlin wools of the 19th century. Birmingham City Museum has a chair in tent stitch and cushion stitches with a formal pattern of triangles and flower borders, inscribed on the back 1730 *Age* 11. But most intriguing work on chairs followed the contemporaneous tapestry into the charming absurdities of pictorial work. Here the embroiderer had the advantage as she could vary her stitch, even using the early split stitch for faces and satin stitch for solid details, among the tent stitch. Even the William Kent illustrations to Gay's

Fables might be copied (first published 1727) as on the settee and six chairs in the Birmingham City Museum.

Some delightful hoop-back, cabriole leg chairs were finished in the traditional manner, with the fabric brought over the rails and made neat with fringe or braid but others now had drop-in seats, the better to display their rich walnut veneers. Chippendale liked the seats "stuffed over the Rails, and having a Brass Border neatly chased". He refers to the use of brass nails for securing the upholstery in one or two rows and sometimes "done to imitate Fretwork". Close nailing was particularly popular in the period 1725-75.

The daybeds of the later 17th century and the loveseats and settees of the 18th century required a prodigious number of stitches for even the simplest embroidery covering yet many extremely attractive specimens remain. Some even retain their original covering and others have manifestly had their coverings specifically designed and made for them although there is contemporary evidence that embroidered clothes might be used up as furniture coverings. The early daybed required a full length mattress cover and a set of three or four cushions in graduated sizes. The settee like the chair tended to display pictorial work on the back and less ambitious flower designs on the seat, the double chair style of back being treated with two well-balanced pictorial reserves. These were often executed with a bold sense of design lacking in many of the later replacements, matched by rich warm-toned reds and yellows and deep blues. A long mid-Georgian settee might be given three pictorial panels in the back, such as three Apocryphal scenes in shaped reserves surrounded by sprays of carnations, roses and so on; the seat then might have three panels of less elaborate design, worked perhaps with fabulous monsters among flowers.

The beautiful serpentine shaping to the backs of mid-18th century seat furniture made particularly attractive frames to the pictorial needlework: Chippendale in his French chairs specifies tapestry "or other sort of Needlework". Printed cottons were too tightly woven to wear well when nailed on to furniture. A mahogany and gilt armchair at Arundel Castle demonstrates the infinitely more personal

charm of needlework, having the eagles of its carved arm supports introduced as an integral part of the needlework design.

Alternatives to needlework for chairs were so numerous in the 18th century that one marvels today at such enthusiasts as Mrs. Delany with her carpets and chair covers, her stools ornamented with the "worsted chenille" on a flax thread that she had made for her in Ireland. One marvels that she could leave the fascinations of amber turning, shell grotto work, paper filigree and all the nonsensical fancywork of her day in favour of the solid craftsmanship and sustained effort of furniture needlework and cross stitch carpeting to go around her bed. She approved a ground of speedier cross stitch to the tent stitch ornament, expressing every needlewoman's lament "it is provoking to have the ground take up so much more time than the flowers".

In the later years of the century, however, the sheer number of chairs in a fashionable room was daunting. Hepplewhite's *Guide* published in 1788 shows "the necessary and proper furniture for a Drawing-room", including no fewer than eighteen chairs, with stuffed oval backs and stuffed seats, and a couch en suite. The intention was to place certain major pieces of furniture around the walls and let the remaining wall space be "filled up with chairs".

It must be appreciated that interior springing had not yet been introduced: the seat was stuffed with horsehair, an extra little bolster, similarly filled, being fitted around the shaped front of the seat, where usage would soon cause loose stuffing to recede and the underlying framework to reassert itself. A feature of the later 18th century was the low, broad bergere chair, back and arms wholly covered in upholstery or filled with caning. Two of these, with an intervening stool, formed the *duchesse*, or *duchesse brisé*. Such short-lived, entirely comfortable pieces must be included in any survey of the more plentiful "occasional" chairs which seem to give an air of unreal severity to this period.

As for the finish of these chairs, the lovely tasselled fringes of the 17th century were long out of fashion, but the amateur making of fringes, even the use of "engines" or "machines" for making them, continued into the 19th

century. Two "engines" were supplied for £40 by Gerreit Jensen in 1690, and as late as the 19th century George IV's Queen Caroline had a machine for knotting fringes. Deep graduated fringes were a feature of some Sheraton designs in his *Drawing Book*. In his later *Cabinet Dictionary*, 1803, he recommended a brass bead to hide the tacks, just as a gilded wooden strip had been used on some stools at Hampton Court more than half a century earlier in William Kent style, in the wave scrolls associated with his work.

A richly furnished bed of the 17th or 18th century required stools and footstools en suite with the chairs; and fashion trends in chairs may be traced, too, in fabric-covered buffet stools. Some attractive stools were covered by home embroiderers for less formal use than big, embroidered chairs, such as a set of two double and eight single stools worked by Sophia Lady Newdigate. According to the attractive tradition Sir Roger Newdigate prompted his wife to work the covers with articles such as might chance to be found upon them in the popular *trompe l'œil* manner. A typical example appears to have a be-ribboned hat upon it and an almanac dated "For August 1757".

Some stool and chair embroidery continued into the 19th century. Covers worked in soft Berlin wools are unmistakable in their regular, straight-lined patterns, dominated by heavy purplish roses but often attractive. Some pictorial covers were worked, ambitious and to modern eyes overlaboured: the canvas might be merely laid over the fabric to guide the stitches and then withdrawn thread by thread. Various grades of canvas were available, and wools of appropriate thicknesses. Some canvas was finished to resemble silk, requiring no background fillings. Even at the time such work was criticised for its uninteresting monotony. One commentator on the Irish exhibition of 1853 exclaimed, "To future generations it will be a matter of astonishment that in the first half of the 19th century . . . the production of fantastic forms in what is called Berlin work, should have occupied months, frequently years of female education . . . The inmates of even our fashionable boarding schools devoted their time to the production of covers for footstools, which attempted artistic decorations

which would positively offend the eye of the veriest savages."

From at least the 17th century onwards, however, there were many alternatives for the girl with a flair for furniture needlework, infinitely more varied if no less painstaking. Embroidery-ornamented mirror frames, like the caskets now equally avidly collected, are discussed in Chapter 13. The mirror craze of the later 17th century may be regarded as largely a result of technical advances in the glass trade, but the craze for gambling that produced the superb array of 18th-century card tables was an emphatic expression of social history and indeed but another expression of the same battle against ennui countered by those who worked wool coverings for those tables in cross stitch embroidery (Fig. 20).

When such a folding table has had little wear it presents its period's needlework vividly fresh and sparkling. One popular notion was a square or octagonal table cover embroidered to represent a game of cards, which obviously would render the table virtually useless for serious play but looks attractive today with two or four hands of cards casually laid out and in the centre a bag with a tasselled draw-string piled to overflowing with counters. There may be more counters scattered on the table, round and fish-shaped but clumsier than the mother of pearl fish recorded by Lady Grisell Baillie at the beginning of the century, or the exquisitely carved pearl counters still found today. Other tables have Watteau-esque pastorals within their flowered borders, or appear strewn with flowers.

It is sadly easy however to demonstrate with 18th-century needlework how idleness saps the will to work, to trace the changing attitude, during that century, to the meticulous craft of stitchery. Around 1700 the urge to beautify the home with needlework even prompted the creation of little wall sconces with minor pictorial idylls, though the matt surface of the embroidery was a poor reflective agent compared with embossed silver or bevelled mirror glass. These are charming. Some are exactly matching pairs, but worked perhaps in different colourings. Or there may be a lady and gentleman each in a detailed country setting. Some display

the strange mixture of classic and Oriental associated with the first few years of the 18th century, with figures from classical mythology among Chinese pheasants and pagodas. Even a pair of bellows may be decorated with a tent stitch scene, such as the pair in the Glasgow Museum dated 1673 and worked on satin in the silks and metal threads and seed pearls associated with stump work (Fig. 20). Even here the figure, seated to fit within the circular framing, has behind her the popular turreted mansion among the trees so common to this style that one forgets how remarkably the designer refined these details to conventionalised forms.

The dwindling of enthusiasm, however, the change of attitude, soon manifested itself, and nowhere more conspicuously than among the 18th and 19th centuries' innumerable firescreens. The draughty great rooms of the 17th-century mansion required screens in plenty, as protection to candles as well as from the heat of monumental fires. Charles I's possessions included a number of embroideries for screens: one with the colours of England and Scotland joined together sold after his death for £7 5s. od. *Small Antique Furniture* (Lutterworth Press, 1958) describes the changing styles of the screen framework.

By the early 18th century the two-fold screen had been augmented by the cheval or horse style, often with a rectangular panel to slide up and down. This was still popular in the 19th century, when fine tent stitch might be ill-served by coarse machine-carved framing. Either of these screen designs might represent nearly the equivalent of a single chair's upholstery and might show the same bold, well composed design inspired by tapestry with a central pictorial motif worked in tent stitch. A rococo framework of heavy scrolling might be included in the stitched design, tending to become more elaborate towards the mid-18th century, or the wooden gilded framing might be elaborately shaped.

In the hands of an expert like Lady Allgood a cheval screen became a mass of rich colour and detailed design, showing, for instance, a lady and child exploring an exotic, fairy-tale garden. England never lost its head so completely as France to the notion of playing at pastoral scenes and there is often a glimpse of real rural England in the hillocky

scenes of farm and flock, the goats being milked, the doves and haywain.

Other screen designs are composed mainly of flowers with one or two birds or animals among them and a few hillocks as a base, or the popular bowl of flowers. A four-fold screen worked in the 1730s by Frances Countess of Mar, sister of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, has two panels of flower designs and two of be-ribboned ostrich feathers worked in chenille against a tent stitch background. Lady Elizabeth Newdigate worked a two-fold screen with swags of flowers and gay ribbons against an effective, loosely worked background of long-and-short stitch in 1754 when she was 84.

As dainty little pole screens became popular, however, the wisps of silk embroidery they required tended to become poor little efforts with a self-effacing amateur air about them. Some, of course, were extremely finely worked, with the colourless delicacy of the period's mezzotints. Such work in silk or cotton thread on linen or lutestring was still in favour in the mid-19th century. Some reflected the Adam designs for hangings, with sphinxes, cameo groups and other "safe" themes in stitchery or appliqué on watered silk. The effect may be very attractive with the cream-toned watered silk setting off the wool motifs in the lime greens and other "modern" colours, shaded where necessary with paint. But even the embroiderer working conventional husk patterns could seldom resist the temptation to turn her honeysuckle into real flowers. More typical are the pastorals in which a minimum of stitches on the white silk ground are helped out by painted skies, faces and other difficult details in a striving towards realism that is more distressingly artificial than any of the impossible clouds or physiognomies of earlier work.

Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill had a screen in a carved and gilded frame "worked in chenille to suit the chimney, by the Countess of Aylesbury": these too may be found today, still attractive if well designed and if the background has kept its freshness, but assuredly needlework at its very simplest. Sometimes chenille flowers wreath a painted panel.

FURNITURE EMBROIDERY

The mahogany tripod frame is a delightful piece of furniture in itself: study of contemporary furniture soon helps one to distinguish the early, well-modelled pillar-and-claw leg construction, with sharply carved acanthus pole base and knees and grippy, well-arched ball-and-claw feet. A spring screw should hold the screen where required on the pole, the screen itself being rectangular, oval or the shield that to its makers was "vase shaped". "A neat mahogany pillar and claws screen neatly carv'd to her Majesty's piece of Needlework" was supplied for £3 10s. 0d. by the renowned William Vile in 1763 for Queen Charlotte.

Among embroidery enthusiasts much of this work continued into the 19th century. Embroidered work boxes and pouch tables, for example, were popular, their frames designed by cabinet makers and the patterns on their pouches reiterated on scissor case, pincushion, needlebook, tape measure holder, thimble box—all the fascinating "elegancies" beloved of that period. Sophie von la Roche in 1786 commented on the neat stands for "pretty embroidered work boxes which have just arrived at Lady Fielding's, consisting of three smooth round legs made of mahogany or of any other wood attractively painted, placed next to one another and fastened". Many other small pieces of furniture, too, were decorated in early 19th-century canvas stitches, in charmingly fresh and well-composed flower groups. These were finely worked in silks and in worsteds of cotton fineness before the country fell under the spell of cross stitch Berlin wool brilliancies.

The 19th century's cross stitch wool work is a subject in itself. For many years around the mid-century not only chairs and stools were worked, but screens and such period pieces as bell pulls and piano fronts. The patterns are those found on other decorative industrial art of the period and are considered in Chapter 19. Needlework for furniture shown at the 1851 Exhibition was designed for ottomans, screens, wall hangings, table covers, chairs, with such subjects as panoramic views of Windsor, and sunset on Tintern Abbey. Couched braiding in scrolling arabesques was applied to much heavy furnishing fabric such as portieres, and this, too, was exhibited: for example, a scarlet table

cloth braided with 2,000 yards of black mohair cord.

The *art nouveau* needlework of the 1870s is still too recent to be classed among antiques but offers some attractive screens and large panels in light creamy tones with more or less Japanese motifs. Peacocks, too, were in fashion again. Lady Marian Alford commenting in 1886 particularly approved the change from white crochet antimacassar to the subdued tones of crewel veils of linen. "No well regulated eye could do otherwise than suffer from the glaring white pattern of crochet work, mounted aggressively on the back of every chair in the room . . . Our great grandmothers embroidered the chairs . . . True they wore powder and pomatum then—but they never leant back—nowadays we wear neither powder nor pomatum. On the contrary we dye, dry, and frizzle our hair till it might serve as a brush to remove any dust encountered, and it spoils nothing."

Chapter Nine

BED HANGINGS AND PILLOWS

UNTIL late in the 17th century the bed and its furnishings constituted the only real comfort in the English home. Old inventories indicate the common practice of setting up beds like so many private tents in practically every room of the house including kitchen and "pastry". At night they offered the more important members of the household warmth and privacy and in the day they served as impressive declarations of wealth and status: visitors approached as to a throne and departed honoured or humbled as the situation required. A mother would receive congratulations and good wishes for her baby surrounded by the household's most glittering brilliance of silk and gold; the bereaved would receive condolences among all-black bed furnishings in a black-draped room, for every rich family had its "mourning bed".

When cane chairs and daybeds were introduced to post-Restoration England even their limited comfort made them enormously popular. They still required mattresses and cushions for real ease but they marked the transition to the overstuffed furniture of the 18th century and the final segregation of the sleeping chambers from the daytime living quarters in the big, crowded households that led the fashions in English home-making.

Typical Tudor and early Stuart furniture inventories list the bare boards—benches, stools, settles, a few (arm) chairs and many bedsteads—but rarely indeed with any item valued at much more than a few shillings. The house was transformed into a home by its textiles. Wall hangings and bed curtains provided warmth and decoration and for comfort there were pillows and coverlets, and every kind of mattress, bag and cod. Mattresses, featherbeds and bolsters

were basic requirements allowed with little else in many a servants' quarters. But curtains, pillows and cushions represented necessity transformed into elegance and beauty as an enduring declaration of wealth and grandeur.

It is easy to linger over the departed glories of those early beds. Wills of medieval days refer to splendid embroideries upon the beds' hangings and upon the costers or hangings around the walls that were equally a part of the room's decoration. Many bore allegorical figures and others the heraldic charges which, even in the mid-19th century, were applauded by Pugin for curtain enrichment. Edward the Black Prince bequeathed "our bed of camora [camel's hair woven with silk] powdered with blue eagles", and his widow (1385) "my new bed of red velvet embroidered with ostrich feathers of silver and heads of leopards of gold with boughs and leaves issuing out of their mouths". Some hangings were paned or paled, just as clothing was from Chaucer's day to Shakespeare's, the vertical strips of contrasting colour emphasising the hang of the curtain folds and making a virtue of narrow-width fabrics as in "a bed of velvet white and black paled" (1434, Lady Bergavenny).

The list is endless and fascinating . . . "one large bed of black satin embroidered with white lions and gold roses and escutcheons of the arms of Mortimer and Ulster" (1380); "Norwich stuffs embroidered with butterflies" (1394) in reference to the long-famed woollens from Worsted in Norfolk, or "blue worsted embroidered with a stag of yellow worsted" suggesting bold appliqué design, although it must be remembered that the term Norwich stuffs recurs later in reference to Norwich or Lynn tapestries; "my bed of silk, black and red, embroidered with woodbined flowers of silver, and all the costers and apparel that belongeth thereto . . ." (1434); "ane bed equallie dividit in claith of gold and silver maid in figure of pottis of flowris with broderie work of lang roundis callit ovaill quhairin the histories [pictorial figure embroidery] are contenit" (Mary Queen of Scots, 1561).

Such embroideries were worked on the tester or canopy over the bed, the celour at its head and the curtains hanging around it with valances to mask their tops and with bases

BED HANGINGS AND PILLOWS

around the bedstock itself. An inventory of Henry VIII's wardrobe includes "a Ceeler and Tester of blew velvet embroderd with golde and small perles like unto a banquet upon the Ceeler and havinge the Kinges Armes holden upp withe great Anteloppes upon the Testor, the said Testor beinge . . . fringed on bothe sides with a narrowe fringe of Venyce golde read and purple silke and lyned with read bokeram . . ."

Such records indicate the difficulty in differentiating with certainty between celour and tester, as to which was over the bed and which at the head. Nonesuch Palace records a white Turkey silk celour over the bed and tester at the head, all embroidered with popinjays, and another of purple silk embroidered with dolphins. It has even been suggested that the tester might be the frame work and the celour the fabric covering for this suspended over the bed.

The vast list of beds and their furniture at Sheffield Castle in 1582 offers a wonderful picture of the Earl of Shrewsbury's household but perhaps adds to the confusion. From this list it appears that here the tester was placed over the bed and might be of carved wood or of fabric. "One top tester of blue velvet lined with blue changeable taffeta" had coverlet and five curtains to match. One bed had a silk "canopy and basynge"; another had a square tester and valance and several had double valances, perhaps an alternative name for the bases. There was opportunity for variety in a household that could list 82 feather beds, 111 bolsters, 133 pairs of sheets though only, it may be noted, five pillow beres and six silk-covered square pillows. Today collectors generally refer to the celour at the head of the bed and to the tester over it as a roof.

Until the second half of the 15th century even the tester was hung from the ceiling by chains: the distinction in old records is clear between such a "hanged bed" and a "standing bed with wrought poles" (Matthew White, Co. Durham, 1586) in which posts supported the tester. Old MSS illustrations show the bed curtains looped up bag-like so that for daytime use the bedstock—the wooden frame threaded with cords or webbing that supported the mattress—could serve as a couch. The woollen fabric and applied

ornament of many early beds would stand such crumpling better than heavy silks. The servant's "boarded bed" had planks instead of cords under a mattress probably of straw. Throughout the period under review the best mattresses were of swansdown, with feathers, flock, wool and straw as cheaper alternatives, feathers being perhaps ten times as costly as flock. Feathers priced at 13s. to 20s. a pound weight in 1602 may be compared with the charge of £18 10s. 0d. for 90 pounds of swansdown in a satin covered bed tick and bolster supplied to Queen Anne by the upholsterer Hamden Reeve in 1712.

One bed might have as many as six mattresses and throughout Tudor and Stuart days great quantities of bed linen were usual: "two pairs sheets of Raynes, a pair of fustians, six pair of other sheets, six pair of blankets, six mattresses, six pillows and with cushions and bann-coves that longen to the bed aforesaid . . ." (Lady Bergavenny, 1434). The final items refer to a fashion much developed later: first a cushioned settle might be included at the bed foot: "an old standing bedstead with a settle unto it" (Sir Thomas Ramsey, 1590). Then chairs and stools upholstered to match became included in the bed's equipment.

The bed itself as distinct from its textile furnishings known as its furniture gradually developed into a more ornate wooden structure. The four posts introduced in the later 15th century were followed by a design with a solid wooden head piece and two posts at the foot, and the change was completed by the use of a wooden tester. Low Elizabethan rooms had beds perhaps seven feet high but some were raised later when post-Restoration brick buildings introduced immensely tall rooms. The Earl of Leicester who died in 1588 left magnificent beds at Kenilworth, indicative of coming fashions, walnut frameworks carved and gilded or "all painted over with crymson and silvered" and heightened by plumes of coloured feathers garnished with lace and gold and silver spangles "standing in cuppes knit all over with gould silver and crymson silk", a technique suggestive of some raised stump work.

Only among the extremely wealthy was the fabric bed taken to its ultimate grandeur in the 17th century when the

headboard became a framework for high relief embroidery and the whole wooden structure might be covered closely with costly textiles in the Continental manner with chairs and stools the same. Hampton Court Palace at Cromwell's death in 1659 still contained a bed "the furniture of rich incarnadine velvett imbroidered very rich with gold and silver conteyning Three Courtones, Fower Cantoines, deep Vallons and bases, Fower caps of the same velvett and embroidered suitable for the same bed. The ceeler and head cloth of the said bed is of rich cloth of gold with inward vallons, cases for the posts and lynngs of the curtains and cantiones all of the same." The bed was protected by "three large courtines of scarlet bazes, being a case about the bed". James II paid £1,515 to the Paris upholsterer Simon de Lobell for a bed embroidered with gold and silver and two elbow chairs and six stools to match.

Well-to-do Tudor and Stuart families adequately flaunted their status or luxuriated in draught-free privacy upon beds of carved and inlaid oak or walnut with textiles restricted to the curtains, valances and bases, and pillows, coverlets and cushions that are today the particular quest of some embroidery collectors.

Some Tudor and Stuart beds were described as sparver-wise: these became known as tent beds and continued through the 18th century. George III never travelled without one. The fabric hung over the bedstead like a tent and the whole great accumulation of fabric and ornament could be dismantled in a way impossible with a massive wooden-pillared structure. A more interesting point is the frequent reference to field beds in old records and there is much to suggest that these were of somewhat similar construction, the important feature being that the "field-bedstead" was entirely separate from the "fieldbed"—the fabric—which was in a hanging tent style. Randle Holme, 1649, in *The Academie of Armory* describes these as beds made higher (than testerless bedsteads) "with an head so that they may be set in a chamber corner or under a cant roof" where a square, rigid four-poster obviously would not fit.

It is impossible to regard them as simple little beds for the field of battle: the Earl of Northampton, whose rich

furnishings were well in advance of fashion, owned many sumptuous examples in 1614. In each case the term *fieldbed* in his inventory refers to the soft furnishings: with it, sometimes as an entirely separate item, sometimes in another room, goes the *fieldbedstead* belonging to that particular *fieldbed*. In the richest example the *fieldbed* of purple velvet, its tester and single valance significantly described as “*imbrodred highe with flowers piramides wise*”, suggesting a tent shape, was valued at £220; the *fieldbedstead* at £4. Each of his *fieldbeds* appears to have been fitted with five curtains, the extra one presumably being required to go at the head of the bed, behind and showing above the headboard. His half-bedsteads, which would have solid headboards up to the halfway-projecting testers, had two curtains apiece.

Even less well-to-do folk spent proportionately highly on their beds and bedding: for example, Henry Widdrington, a Northumberland gentleman, had household goods to the inventoried value of £15 12s. 0d. in 1625: his bedsteads were valued at 6s. 8d., but the bedding at nearly £6. Some inventories of the period indicate that virtually the only furniture worth listing consisted of chests and aumbries that held the dozens of pairs of sheets, blankets, towels, napkins.

It must be realised of course that much of the rich bed furniture would be worked professionally. For the birth of her daughter in 1612 the Countess of Salisbury had hangings of white satin embroidered with silver and pearls reputed to cost £14,000. But there is evidence in plenty that some home needlewomen ventured on this huge task. Anne Boleyn worked a bed tester for Henry VIII, and a number of hangings and valances remain strongly linked with Mary Queen of Scots, including some she probably worked in association with the Countess of Shrewsbury—Elizabeth Talbot, known as “*Bess of Hardwick*” (1518–1608), while the Earl of Shrewsbury was the queen’s custodian.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has fascinating bed curtains, valance and coverlet and a number of other panels worked in coloured silks with various devices and inscriptions and curiously named creatures including even centipede (a “*scolopender*”). These may be attributed

the period's books of emblems and fables such as Claude Paradin's *Devises Héroïques* and Whitney's *Emblemes*. "An Eape", for instance, is signed MR; "A Cock of Thalpes" signed ES for Elizabeth Shrewsbury. In the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, there are bed hangings and valances traditionally worked when the queen was held at Lochleven Castle, 1567-68, most impressively expert in their handling of black appliqué velvet and softly tinted silk cord, on a ground of crimson wool in a formal brocade pattern of flowers and conventionalised plants in vases.

The Countess of Shrewsbury herself left many specimens of embroidery worked by her, and more worked under her expert direction, including wall hangings for "the best bed chamber", now in the great hall. Horace Walpole exclaimed at their "figures as large as life, representing the Virtues and the Vices embroidered [appliqué] on grounds of black velvet". Lady Anne Drury willed "a cloth bed of my own working" in 1621.

A full set of bed furniture was no light undertaking. There would be four or five lined curtains—sometimes three—and sometimes with the main curtains supplemented by narrower ones to fill any possible draughty gaps. It appears that such curtains at the head of the bed were known as bone graces, and when hung at the other curtain openings might be called cantonieres, a term also used for additional corner pieces above them, covering the posts between the valances. There would be three stiff bases perhaps with minor flower slips or a formal sprig pattern to mask the lower bed frame and three valances often of similar outline but more elaborately ornamented.

Even the valances would measure on average about 6 feet 6 inches long and perhaps almost 2 feet wide. Since they were stitched and stiffened pelmet fashion to cover the union of curtains and tester, they were particularly suitable for pictorial embroidery and are a special delight to collectors. One notes Biblical scenes in Elizabethan tent stitch—a "strip" of the life of Jacob, perhaps—in silks and gold, or quaint hummocky pastorals or exotic flowers and leaves in late 17th century crewel work at its liveliest and most detailed. An Elizabethan series at the Victoria and Albert

Museum is interesting, worked in wool highlighted with silk in tent stitch on linen with decorative Biblical and mythological scenes, as full of incident and detail as tapestries. These may be Scottish, influenced by France (Plate B).

There would be a coverlet on the bed to be worked, too, cushions for chairs and stools and embroidered pillow beres to emphasise the bed's daytime status of luxury. Heavy fringes and elaborate knotted borders had been associated with bed furniture from the 16th century. They helped the curtains to hang well even in a draughty room, an important consideration when there would be candles burning within.

An interesting indication of typical requirements is quoted by Maciver Percival from a letter, August 4, 1683, among the East India Company's correspondence ordering "100 suits of painted curtains and vallances ready made up of several sorts and pieces . . . You know that only the poorest people in England lye without any curtains or vallances and our richest in damask etc. The Vallances to be 1 foot deep and $6\frac{1}{2}$ yards compass. Curtains to be from 8 to 9 feet deep, the 2 lesser curtains each $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards wide, the two larger curtains to be $3\frac{1}{2}$ yards wide and 2 yards long. Each bed to have two small Carpetts, $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards wide and 2 yards long, each bed to have 12 cushions for chairs of the same work."

By then the vivid beauty of form and colour and the imaginative gaiety of design associated with Eastern ornament was contributing importantly to the style of English bed furniture and the home embroiderer was delighting in the crewel work bed hangings discussed in Chapter 3. These bold and lovely patterns worked, with considerable effect of depth, in clear soft-toned wools on a twill of linen and cotton were superb for curtains and valance but rarely if ever used for the bed's tester or coverlet. Tester and colour still tended to be the concern of the professional, but the coverlet, for a longer period than most home embroideries, tended to inspire the richest, most competent and satisfying amateur work.

Needlework is seldom easily dated however. In 1614 the Earl of Northampton possessed, for example, a black field-bedstead painted with flowers and powdered with gold, with his arms upon the head. This had a "tester and valence

powdered with blewe starres and spangles and slippes of severall coulors and billeted, with 5 curtens suteable to the tester. A quilt of poppingey greine sarcenett lined with blewe calicoe stitched with black silke £40." Much of the most elaborate professional work was in the traditional richly heavy manner, the beds growing taller and their tester cornices more overpowering. The love of golden splendour was associated with bed furniture as long as it assumed something of the status of a throne. *The Postman*, 1704, advertised a bed as a lottery prize—not necessarily new, but fashionable—with no less than 2,000 ounces of gold and silver wrought in it. This had four curtains embroidered both sides alike on a white silk tabby, three valances with tassels, three bases, two bonegraces and four cantonieres embroidered in gold tissue cloth.

The heavy style persisted even among the half-tester beds that became fashionable towards the end of the 17th century. These were noted by such commentators as Celia Fiennes in her travels around Britain in the last years of the century: two that she mentioned when visiting the Duke of Norfolk displayed the current trends, one with crewel work on dimity "Well made up", and the other "fine Indian quilting and embroidered with embroidery of silk".

Quilting is such an important and fascinating branch of collectable embroidery that it is considered separately in Chapter 11. Around the beginning of the 18th century some beds were worked in upright stitches in the bright zigzag, all-over pattern known as flame stitch or Florentine stitch, the bands of different coloured silks carefully aligned to achieve effects somewhat suggestive of the combed marbling on paper and pottery. This style of curtain would be matched on the upholstered furniture. It was popular again around the middle of the 19th century, worked in gaudy Berlin wools.

During the 18th century much of the bed's elegance depended upon the fine shaping and carving of the cornice and the tendency was towards lighter, less elaborately decorated fabrics. Full value for the fabrics' texture was obtained by having the curtains "tied up in drapery" with pulleys instead of being drawn back on rods. The thinning worsteds of crewel work might give place to silk embroidery

often in tightly twisted silks but in the delicate spindly manner of much imported work, dominated by quickly worked chain stitch, satin stitch and French or Peking knots, all making the most of the silk upon the surface of the fabric and lending themselves to the irregularities of loosely hanging folds. Whether the big flowers were worked in wools or in silks, in long-and-short stitch or in chain stitch, the convention was to give each petal several lines of graduated colour following its outline, with lively, clear-cut effect. The professional embroideress, Elizabeth Watson of Sword Bearer's Alley in Chiswell Street, who offered "wrought beds from £7 to £40 per bed" in 1710, defined her ornament as "all sorts of fine chain stitch work", her speciality being "wrought beds, curtains and quilts".

Reference has been made in Chapter 2 to the immense influence of Oriental embroideries and the painted and printed chintz that Mary II chose for bed hangings. Sometimes English embroideries supplemented the Oriental work, as in bed hangings possessed by the Marquis of Cholmondeley in the mid-18th century, the white satin back and tester being Chinese and the silk quilt and cushions worked in England in the same design.

Coverlets have remained from this period that are superb specimens of amateur needlecraft. Vivid silks were used with extreme delicacy in designs of Oriental inspiration such as one in the Fitzwilliam Museum (Fig. 21), signed and dated by Mary Thurston, 1694, and a companion one by her sister Sarah, similar but different in many small details, at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Here a fairy tale scene of castle and ship or bridge forms the centrepiece among a delicate powdering of exotic birds and flowers.

Some coverlets at this period were worked on earthy brown linen but the early 18th century is associated especially with silk embroidery over quilted fabric: this might be enduring linen matching quilted linen pillow covers, or the vivid, shimmering satin of some early Georgian bed furnishings at Longleat. These are wholly European in conception, patterned with brilliant flowers—tulips, carnations, roses, poppies, irises and the rest—in gilded baskets in the current taste and given added sparkle by gilded scallop shells

BED HANGINGS AND PILLOWS

and ribbons. Like the period's glass and silver, this is lit by the facet effect of the glossy quilted satin (Fig. 28). Queen Caroline, wife of George II, and her ladies worked a notably rich white satin quilt in 1742. The bunches of flowers are closely grouped and tied with ribbons, but informal and charming, the flowers familiar chrysanthemums, roses, anemones and the like.

Mrs. Delany at Cornbury in 1746 wrote of the bed-chamber hung with Indian paper on a gold ground and the bed "Indian work of silks and gold on white satin", and at this period some thinner linen curtains were worked in crewels with attenuated chain stitch meandering stems and scarce flowers. But others continued the fashion for elaborate baskets, wreaths and bouquets of flowers owing little or nothing to the Orient. It may be noted that the cotton and linen twill (linen warp and cotton weft) of typical crewel work bed curtains might be replaced in the early 18th century by all-linen hangings better suited perhaps to silk embroidery and those in turn tended to give place to all-cotton hangings when these could be made strong enough: even the lightest were lined, as a matter of course, and often heavily and elaborately tasselled.

Certainly it would be a mistake to give undue emphasis to the fashion for chinoiserie. Among other impressive bed hangings associated with the period are those in applied cord work. These depend wholly on grace of line and perfection of execution. Like some of the finest crewel work they came as a relief from the metallic glitter of late Stuart days, the all-white outlines set off by a soft-toned linen ground, lacking both sheen and colour. Some at Ewhurst Park are thought to date to about 1690. Princess Amelia, daughter of George II, did some of this work, using two shades of light buff-grey knotted linen threads applied to the surface of the soft brown linen fabric to work out a big formalised flower pattern. Various forms of knotting were popular to fill restless moments, worked with a shuttle like tatting and producing a kind of cord or gimp. In this bed hanging the leaf and flower outlines are filled with the knotty lines with assertive effect, suggesting the coral that the period adored.

Mrs. Delany and her sister Mrs. Dewes making a bed together in 1743 worked a pattern of leaves all over the nankeen ground, united by bows of ribbon, all cut out in white linen and richly edged and veined in such knotted trimmings. Even at this period, however, hangings were being worked in the older tradition of tent stitch and cross stitch, as were the larger wall hangings exemplified by the seven-yard hangings at Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, which have panels showing Aston Hall and Brereton Hall and smaller scenic border medallions. These might be assumed to be professional work were it not for a signature:

God be the Guide
And the Work Will Abide
Mary Holte Spinster Aged LX
Anno Dom. MDCCXLIV

Late in the century few home embroiderers tackled such work although superb bed coverlets may be found: these are considered in Chapter 11. One interesting set of bed embroideries that has survived is at Hampton Court, made 1775-78 for Queen Charlotte by Mrs. Pawsey who started a school of needlework at Aylesbury. The curtains are of lilac silk, and silk-embroidered with vividly colourful flowers. These substantial naturalistic roses and anemones are a far cry from the fantastic flowers and irrational arrangements associated with chinoiserie embroidery. Even the cream silk panel at the head of the bed—the colour of earlier centuries—displays a massive central vase of roses and other familiar flowers, English work in every petal. Valance and bases are filled with flower wreaths and chairs and stools continue the exercise in realism.

By then many homes were furnished with low beds, free of cornice and curtains. Many people preferred their beds to be as inconspicuous as possible during the day, and bed-makers such as Benjamin Dell (1763-92) advertised not only four poster and standing bedsteads but desk and table bedsteads for an era that tolerated all manner of sham furniture. Comparatively few needlewomen took the trouble to embroider elaborate bed hangings, although by the 1780s patchwork was coming into vogue and in the early 19th

century some impressive sets were made, matching curtains, valance and coverlet, and even celour and tester, in the less arduous form of applied patchwork (see Chapter 11). Even the valance was often gathered, being known as the "petticoat valance", so that it no longer required more elaborate treatment than the curtains. The advertisements of the day show a general preference for cotton and check counterpanes and "washing furnitures", the "Manchester stuffs" recommended by Hepplewhite. By 1800 the bed, like much women's clothing, might be draped in white, in keeping with those curiously spartan years which have comparatively little to offer the collector.

The cushions and ornamented pillow covers of the bed's daytime grandeur are particularly fascinating. Pillows are differentiated from cushions in old records and it is obvious that this implied the observation of certain conventions in materials and treatment. The pillow beres sought by the collector were daytime extras and, like other cushions, their purpose was display throughout the centuries when it appeared very necessary to parade one's status.

Like clothes that rendered manual labour an impossibility, the bed could imply glorious idleness by the quantity and quality of pillows and cushions, and the fashion spread to many a small Elizabethan and Stuart farmer and shopkeeper who could not afford the larger hangings. For example, a Durham man's total possessions inventoried in 1586 were valued at £36 12s. 6d. yet he had six linen pillows and nine cushions—listed immediately after his poultry which, doubtless, provided their fillings. It is not difficult to envisage the desirability of ornamental pillow covers to decorate the bed for visitors, so that they became an expected detail in the preparation of a baby's layette. It is not to be imagined that they were used for sleeping, or even in the daytime during illness. Davies' *Epigrams* describes how

The beau would feign sickness to shew his nightcap fine,
And his wrought pillow overspread with lawn.

Embroidered pillow beres were usually white linen, rarely made from a single piece of fabric, and were worked in silks,

perhaps with silver-gilt and silver thread and even spangles, but never in wool and never in the tapestry style of tent stitch. Some were in drawn work and more perhaps in the white cut work that all Europe loved in late Elizabethan and Stuart days (Chapter 5). Sheets made from narrow widths of linen had their inevitable seams transformed into exquisite lace effects, often more than an inch wide, and pillows received the same care. When only the embroidered front of a pillow bere has been preserved one may note traces of herringbone stitching around the buttonholed edges.

Other pillow cloths are worked in black silk, often with touches of gold, although the black dye has tended to rust the silk. "For sowinge a pillabere with black silke, and for black silke and paper 5*s.* 4*d.*" was recorded in the Howard accounts of Naworth in 1633. William Jenson, a Newcastle merchant, had two pillows with black silk work in 1587 and one with a red seam, which would probably be the period's popular open herringbone seam. The best known Elizabethan patterns of coiling stems bearing flowers and leaves were perfect for the engraving effects required in black and coloured pillow embroidery, and were worked in a variety of delicate, detailed line stitches—back, buttonhole, chain, coral, stem, satin, herringbone and the like—effective in black but radiant when worked in colours. "Imbrodered with a runninge worke of pomgranets grapes and roses silke and gold . . .", "with waterlilly leaves, kinges fishers and other birds and flowers . . .", "with a traile worke of sundrie flowers, strawberys and pinckes . . .", were typical examples of the Earl of Northampton's pillow beres in 1614, valued at 40*s.* a pair.

Some pillows are diapered with diagonal lines, every diamond containing an emblem. Plaited braid stitch stems and closely buttonholed grapes proved impressively substantial. Specimens have been noted exactly copying printed lining papers of the period. There was some pictorial work, too, in such line embroidery.

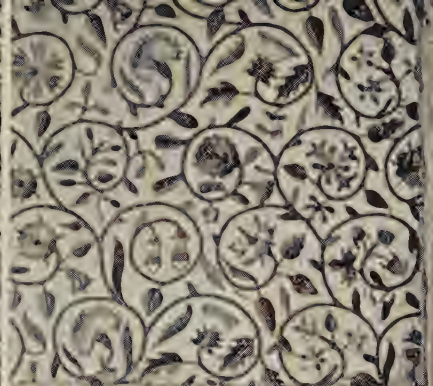
In the finest professional work pillows and coverlet matched in elaborate silk and metal thread embroidery. Thus the king's room at Knole dating to 1670-80 has the



1. *Top left and right*: examples of *opus Anglicanum* dating to the late 13th century. The horseman 8½ inches high is in split stitch and raised work in silk and gold and silver thread. St. George, a detail from the Syon Cope, is in coloured silks and gold within a gold-outlined quatrefoil worked in red silk in underside couching to produce a chevron pattern on the surface entirely covering the linen ground. *Centre and bottom*: curtain and chairback details, both worked in wools in the early 18th century and both showing the same pattern but differently treated. The upper piece is mainly in satin stitch leaving the background uncovered in the crewel-work manner and the lower one is in all-over tent stitch.



2. Portrait of Elizabeth, Countess of Southampton, a maid of honour to Elizabeth I. painted by an unknown artist. Her costume includes scrolling flower embroideries on her bodice and isolated flower slips below, a long filmy dress apron, embroidered stockings and shoes and, beside her, an elaborate collar edged with needlepoint lace. Other notable details are the mirrored casket, the richly-filled pincushion, and the tasselled cushion for the pet dog.



3. Flower treatments of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. *Top left*: black silk on linen worked with print-like clarity in stem, double-coral and speckling stitches on an Elizabethan hood. *Top right*: silks and metal threads in a late 16th-century cooling stem pattern on a cover. *Centre left*: still identifiable flowers and fruits couched in silver-gilt and silver thread and bullions on a red velvet table carpet, probably early 17th century. *Centre right*: nearly ribboned peay in crewels from a bed cover dated 1729. *Bottom left and right*: exotics influenced by the early 18th-century enthusiasm for eastern design, (*left*) in a range of stitches including herringbones, specklings and French knots and (*right*) in chain stitch.



4. Pictorial embroideries of the 17th century. Basically these have much in common and even many of the same filling details. The conspicuous difference in the result illustrates the characteristics of raised or stump work (*above*) and tent stitch (*below*). The upper picture in disjointed detail tells the story of David and Bathsheba, Bathsheba bathing by a style of fountain associated with embroideries of this period and David on his palace balcony and, below, receiving Job's messenger and with Nathan and the poor man of Nathan's parable. The individual motifs, set upon a satin ground, are worked mainly in buttonhole and split stitch with couched and raised work, darned silk pile and lace buttonholing. The lower picture is better composed, confined to a single incident and worked mainly in tent stitch entirely covering the ground with only a few more emphatic details such as crowns of seed pearls.



5. Embroideries influenced by eastern designs. The sleeved waistcoat (left) of George I's reign shows the typical Oriental meandering background pattern in silver-gilt thread, greatly enhancing the coloured silk embroidery in patterns suggestive of porcelain painting. The early 18th-century gown (right) shows the familiar style of tree pattern transformed into a blossom-filled creation vivid with colour and light.



6. Early 18th-century attempts to capture Oriental ideas. The firescreen (*upper left*) attempts to embody a number of pseudo-Chinese notions in a somewhat amateurish design. The bird (*upper right*) shows one of the most popular chinoiserie motifs, finely worked but justifying Chambers's condemnation of lame imitations. The detail (*lower left*) from a woman's petticoat and the bed coverlet (*lower right*) show stylised designs achieving effects comparable with contemporaneous porcelain.



7. Crewel work. Part of a bed valance and part of a curtain of linen and cotton, the crewels worked in a rich tree pattern with the main trunks more than 1½ in. wide. The *upper detail* shows the work put into each stem and leaf. Although the birds are in the fantastic Oriental mood the *hillocks* represented as *mountains* the old Elizabethan manner, with naturalistic flowers and familiar pattern book animals. Second half of the 17th century.



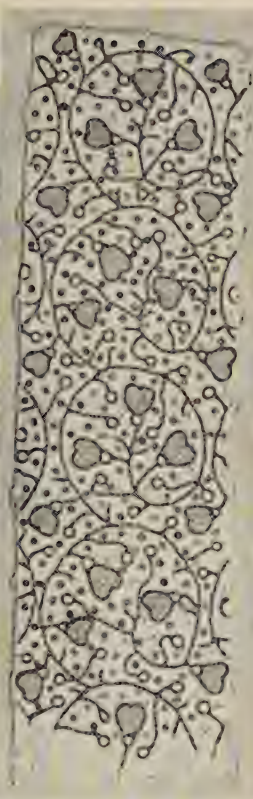
8. Crewel work details from 17th-century hangings. *Upper left*: cotton and linen worked in two shades of green, clinging to the Elizabethan traditions but with a new freedom of stitch. *Upper right*: blue-green wool in a style suggesting a mixture of Dutch and Oriental influences but with familiar English flowers. *Lower left*: a fascinating study of leaf treatments from a cotton hanging measuring 7 ft. 3 in. x 5 ft. 1 in. *Lower right*: late 17th-century specimen on linen and cotton, the coloured crewels showing a graceful flowing line but the flowers less individually.



9. Contrasting treatments of metal thread. *Above*: portion of an 8-foot-long linen cover, of the early 17th century, unfinished but showing a wealth of stitchery, achieving its effect by its varying surface patterns in stem, chain, buttonhole, herringbone and plaited braid stitches and couching. Much is in silver-gilt and silver thread, such as the golden fruit in a basket-work stitch. *Below*: an embroidered pillow of the early 18th century, intensely rich and brilliant but with greater weight and less variety in the application of the silver-gilt thread closely couched in solid ribbon effects, combined with solidly-worked flowers in long and short stitch, comparable with the period's short dress aprons.



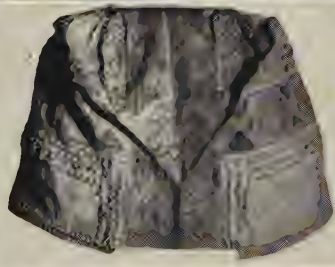
10. Metal thread work. *Top*: sleeved waistcoat of about 1725, with coarsed silver thread as contrast to the flowers in coloured silks in long and short stitch, and the background of yellow satin. *Lower left*: linen "night cap" for intonational wear, early 17th century, almost covered with metal thread, much of it in heavy braids. *Lower right*: magnificent relief work in gold and silver wire on a ground of crimson velvet in the bag of the Great Seal used by Sir Orlando Bridgeman when Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, 1667—72.



11. Blackwork. *Upper left:* portrait of Sir Edward Hoby (1560–1617) painted in 1578, showing delicate black embroidery on his ruff which has to be equally perfect on both sides. *Upper right:* linen panel of the late 16th century embroidered in black silk and silver-gilt thread showing details of an almost identical pattern. *Below:* long pillow cover of the second half of the 16th century worked in black silk on linen in the style of contemporaneous printed lining papers. The edges have been hemmed in buttonhole stitch and show traces of the open herringbone seam stitching that attached the “bottom”.



12. Decorative details for a child's dress of the late 17th century. Linen, embroidered entirely in white in back stitch, the apron enriched with lace.



13. Whitework of the 18th and 19th centuries. *Top:* exquisite baby robe dating to the first half of the 19th century, measuring 75½ in. long, embroidered in cotton on cambric with cut work and fillings of needlepoint lace. *Lower left:* child's shirt, 18th century, showing shoulder panels of bollice work, white embroidery on the front and lace at neck and cuffs. *Lower right:* panels of bollice work including crown and initials on the christening cap of the future George IV.



14. Early examples of pictorial embroidery. *Top*: Nativity scenes embroidered in split stitch and couched work in coloured silks and gold and silver thread set off by a background of crimson velvet, on a long band 10½ in. wide, the detail including a dog howling at the shepherd's piping. Early 14th century. *Centre*: a section of the border of the Bradford table carpet, late 16th century. This is worked in silk in tent stitch, about 400 stitches to the square inch, the whole carpet measuring 13 ft. x 5 ft. 9 in. and the borders full of extraordinarily lively incident. *Bottom*: scenes from the story of Noah on a pillow cover dating to about 1600, one of a set of four worked in silks and silver-gilt thread on linen in stem, chain, back and cross stitches with decorative fillings and specklings.



15. Pictorial embroideries. *Upper left*: Elizabethan grouping of unrelated motifs to form a lively scene on a long cushion, 3 ft. 5½ in. × 1 ft. 10½ in. (only half is shown). Cross stitch and couching supplement the tent stitch, all worked on linen canvas in silks and silver thread and applied to a ground of white satin. *Upper right*: professional work of 1637, "The Adoration of the Shepherds", 3 ft. 7 in. × 2 ft. 4½ in., taken from a Flemish original probably by Martin de Vos and worked by Edmund Harrison, one of the most important members of the Broderers' Company. The figures are worked separately and applied without padding. The faces are in silk in fine split stitch and the clothing mainly in double metal threads arranged horizontally and couched with silk. Other stitches include long-and-short, satin and brick. *Lower left*: early 18th-century transitional piece containing some of the previous century's features but attempting to make a picture rather than to tell a story. Worked in silks mainly in split and satin stitches. *Lower right*: the pastoral idyll at its most advanced stage, worked by M. L. Sasse, 1816. This is produced with a minimum of effort in silks and chenille with masses of French knots for the sheep. Faces, hands and hair are painted on the silk background.



16. Early Georgian pictorial embroidery. *Top*: taken from a mezzotint by Simon and demonstrating the embroiderer's difficulties in attempting naturalistic faces. A stiff and somewhat ungainly study of George I and the Prince and Princess of Wales worked mainly in long- and short stitch in silks on satin. 1717-20. *Below*: Biblical scene of about the same date, Rebekah meeting Abraham's servant Eliezer. Much of this recalls the previous century's stump work, but shows a new awareness of eastern motifs and the period's exotic birds as well as the long-familiar acorns and squirrel.



17. Late pictorial work. *Top left*: self-portrait by Mrs. Mary Knowles working on her needlework portrait of George III. This is dated 1779. *Top right*: the portrait of George III by Mary Knowles, dated 1771. She copied this from the Zoffany portrait but altered an occasional minor detail. *Below*: a strikingly effective study of two hares, a late 18th-century design by William Blake worked by his friend and patron Mrs. Thomas Butts in characteristic Blake colouring.



18. Book embroideries. *Above*: book cushion, $16\frac{1}{2}$ in. $\times$ $11\frac{1}{2}$ in., dating to the second quarter of the 17th century, worked in silk in tent stitch on canvas and including many of the most popular motifs of its period's pictorial embroideries. *Below left*: mid-17th-century binding showing how such pictorial work might be simplified for this purpose. *Below right*: contrastingly rich 17th-century binding in an intricate pattern to suggest leather tooling and with great use of metal, including pinched plate and purl, and knotted silk to take the rub of wear. The top of a book mark may be notes hanging over the top; and traces of the ribbons for tying.



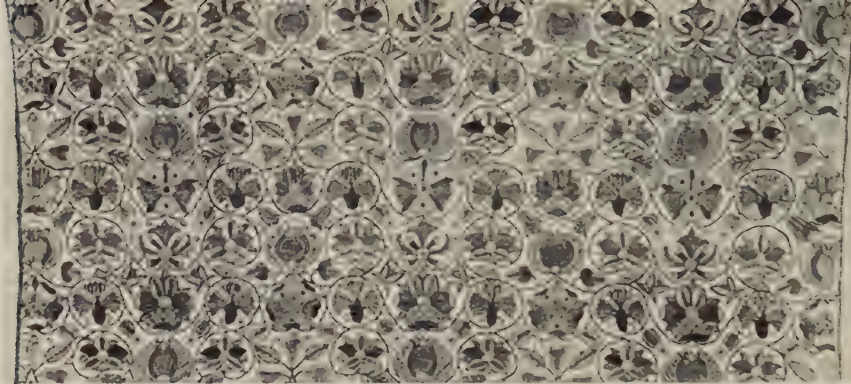
19. Chair embroideries. *Upper left:* immensely rich design of flowers and vase on the back of a late Stuart armchair. Worked in wools with touches of silk in cross stitch in vivid colours including reds, tawny yellows and browns against an indigo background. *Upper right:* the most elaborate embroidery was used on the back of the chair, such as a figure or scene often seeking to suggest contemporaneous tapestry. Here the seat has been recovered in a conventional leaf design. *Lower left:* the Victorian love of roadsides attractively worked out in cross stitch on the seat and low back of a little chair that belonged to Queen Victoria at Osborne House. *Lower right:* chair seat worked in wools in cross stitch on canvas, showing how the early Victorian's love of rich, crowded design overwhelmed the naturalistic flower work of the century's early years.



20. Furniture embroideries. *Upper left*: cheval firescreen of about 1740 mounted with a contemporaneous embroidery in tapestry style, the subject being the rape of Proserpine. *Upper right*: early 18th-century card table in walnut, the top embroidered to suggest hands of cards thrown down among circular and fish-shaped counters. *Below*: raised or stump work in simplified but still characteristic detail for application to a pair of bellows. Worked in coloured silks and metal threads and seed pearls on white satin.



21. Superb examples of later 17th-century bed furnishing. The upper specimen is from a set of bed furniture worked in coloured wools by Abigail Pett, showing exotic trees, many on gnarled roots typical of Chinese patterns, interspersed with motifs ranging from Morris dancers to camels, monkeys and fabulous birds. The lower specimen is from a bedspread in the chinoiserie manner worked by Mary Thurston, signed and dated 1694. This is in coloured silks and some metal thread on white satin. A cover worked by her sister Sarah has an almost identical pattern but a different little fairytale centrepiece.



22. Ornamental pillows. *Top*: the coiling stem theme incorporating a range of familiar flowers in a symmetrical pattern worked in silks and metal threads in a wide selection of colours. From a set of four, early 17th century. *Centre*: interesting exercise in delicate stitchery suggesting green fern fronds with silver stems, worked in satin stitch, couching and French knots and richly scattered with spangles. This is dated to the early 17th century but is in the mood of later furniture marquetry. *Bottom*: graded colours solidly worked over a diapered background to achieve a rich effect in strong contrast to the earlier linear pillow embroideries. This specimen measures 13 in. $\times$ 8½ in., but larger pillows exist with only slight pattern modifications.



23. Long cushions. *Top:* Elizabethan herbal wood-cut "slips" and minor fillings worked on linen and applied to a cover of black velvet. *Center:* interlaced pattern framing roses, finely worked in wools; about 1600. *Bottom:* early 17th century, worked in silks, silver-gilt thread and wool in tent stitch by Mary Hilton. The minute stitches average 31 to the inch.



24. Cushion covers. *Upper left*: late 16th century, worked in wool with light touches of silk on linen canvas in cross stitch and long-arm cross stitch, the flower slips boldly stylised, perhaps harmonising with Turkey-work chair coverings. This measures 1 ft. 7½ in. × 1 ft. 7 in. *Upper right*: late 16th century, worked in silks, silver-gilt thread and metal strips on red satin, the individual flowers being conspicuously clear and recognisable. Size: 1 ft. 8½ in. × 1 ft. 7 in. *Lower left*: part of a long cushion cover dated 1672 worked in wool and linen in an interestingly amateurish design suggesting woodcut printing. The whole cushion measures 4 ft. 3 in. × 2 ft. 1 in. *Lower right*: typical of much attractive cross stitch work of the mid-19th century, in coloured silks. In such a piece there is a tendency for the unworked background to become dingy before the embroidery shows any sign of wear.



25. *Upper left and right: costume quilting. The lady's petticoat is of the 1730s to 1740s; the cavalier's doublet and breeches date to 1620–30, plain white satin setting off the embroidered sword band and gloves. Below: pillow sham, late 17th century, the whole design achieved by back stitch quilting in silk on linen.*



26. Quilting used as a serviceable, rich-looking basis for decorative costume. *Top*: heavily embroidered sleeved waistcoat of the early 18th century. *Below left*: early 18th-century child's coat. *Below right*: 17th-century petticoat very richly worked towards the hem; cream-coloured silk quilted in silk.



27. Details of fine quilting. *Top*: late 17th century, from a robe of quilted linen showing the stitching required for even a comparatively simple pattern in so-called Italian quilting. *Lower left*: early 18th-century flower-basket design taken from a dress. *Lower right*: dating to about 1770, a detail from a cot cover in quilted linen, each leaf and petal delicately worked in a range of stitches to enrich the surface texture, and including openwork fillings to ensure an airy covering.



28. Bed coverlets. The hexagonal patchwork dates to about 1837 made in a honeycomb pattern of printed cottons by Elizabeth Cakebread. This is unfinished, the pieces still tacked to their cards. The early 18th-century basket of flowers is part of an exceptionally brilliant coverlet, from a set of bed furnishings at Longleat, Warminster. The flowers of vividly coloured silks in brightly gilded baskets are set off by a ground of shimmering satin.



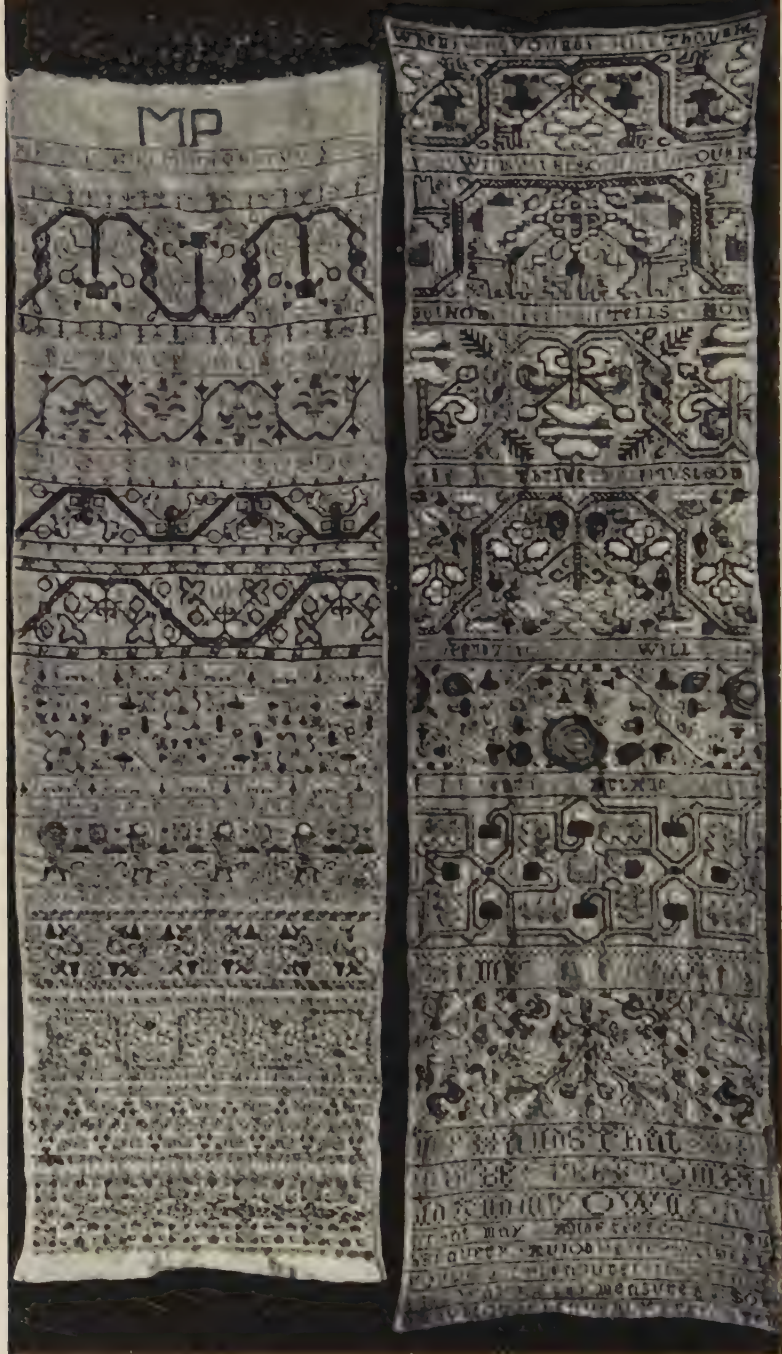
29. Patchwork. The upper portion, part of a late 18th-century bed curtain, is in the difficult curving shell pattern enhanced by green silk braid outlining the panels. The quilt below is patchwork appliqué, the motifs cut from printed fabrics serving only as decoration, being sewn on to a plain ground.



30. Early samplers. *Left*: probably late Elizabethan white work in cut and drawn thread with two bands of openwork at the top in gold and silver thread. Worked and signed by Susan Negabri. *Right*: the early style of scattered motifs and stitche on a wide sampler of loosely woven linen. Worked in silk and metal thread in a wide range of stitches including rococo, chain, braid, plaited braid and eyelet holes. Initialed PB.



31. Seventeenth-century samplers. *Left*: linen band sampler worked with coloured silk and white linen surface stitches and white work on drawn and cut threads. This is signed SA and dated 1673. Three figures sometimes called boxers may be seen upside down near the top. *Right*: the earliest known sampler bearing a date — 1630. An interesting assemblage of motifs familiar on the period's pictorial embroidery and the slips and scrolls associated with dress ornament.



32. Band samplers of the later 17th century. *Left*: an immense amount of small detailed work, already suggesting a girl's demonstration of needle skill unrelated to probable application of stitch or pattern. *Right*: largely worked in cross stitch but showing some partly-detached flower petals in the "stump-work" manner.

As in very many later samplers this includes a lengthy verse beginning

*When I was young I little thought
That we must be so dearly bought . . .*



33. Children's samplers of the 18th century. *Upper left*: so-called map sampler, dated 1780, worked in coloured silks on sarcenet by ten-year old Ann Rhodes who possibly had some personal connection with the salt works noted on the Norfolk coast. *Upper right*: by nine-year-old Jane Perry, typical of the symmetry expected of late sampler work in cross stitch and the difficulties encountered over the usual zig-zag flowered border. *Lower left*: Welsh sampler worked by Mary Lewis, 1824, on wollen canvas embroidered with coloured silks in a considerable range of stitches with a number of unusual motifs such as the creeper-covered arbour and, in the foreground, a sinking ship. *Lower right*: divided horizontally into four compartments the largest displaying an interesting attempt to show a pond and garden in front of the cottage and house and a pair of shepherds under the tree. By nine-year-old Lucilla Thurlow, dated 1826.



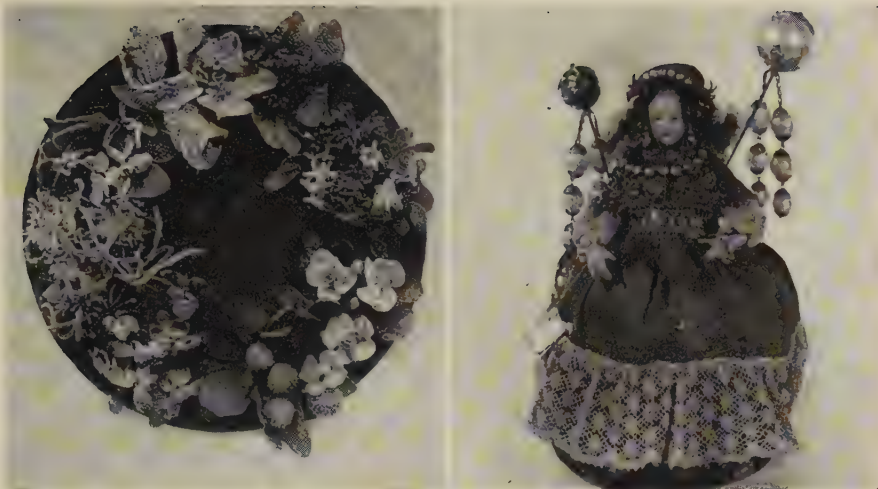
34. Raised or stump work. *Above*: tortoiseshell-mounted looking glass, 30½ in. × 35½ in., containing eight panels embroidered by Mrs. Baston of Taunton in the late 1680s. Every detail of dress is exquisitely worked and the background filled with familiar motifs including the lion and leopard and the curiously popular fish pond. *Below*: dressing case 15½ in. wide × 9½ in. high, with a lifting top enclosing mirror and toilet fittings. The front doors enclose three short and one long drawer, with quickly embroidered fronts. The top bears four raised work figures emblematical of the Seasons; the front and side panels include a cavalier, seated beside the familiar fountain, holding an enormous carnation, a lady and various minor figures.



35. *Above*: mid-17th-century picture on white satin of Alpheus pursuing Arethusa, from an engraving by Crispin de Passe, framed in an elaborate scalloped border of couched purl outlined in pinched plate. *Below*: a mirror frame in the collection of Lady Richmond, shown with the doors closed over the glass. This is worked with some parts raised by padding and with the faces tinted and only partly embroidered. European and negress are in suitably differentiated settings, the negress smoking, and the whole design is exceptionally lively for this style of work.



36. Pincushions of the 17th and 18th centuries. *Top*: flowers, birds, squirrel, even a snail, decorate this typical 17th-century piece which was but continuing the long established tradition for embroidered cushions; 10 in. x 5½ in. *Centre*: an early large example of the style decorated entirely with pinheads of various shapes; 13 in. x 9½ in. Dated 1652. *Bottom*: conventional pattern in the hand-made pins that were the important part of such a gift pincushion, enhanced by the fringe effect achieved with a border of large round-headed pins. On the back it is marked "Stuck 1745".



37a. *Left*: beadwork sprays of flowers and fruits dating to the second half of the 17th century, made into a mat at a later date. The fashion was revived in the 19th century. *Right*: pincushion in one of the many fanciful styles associated with the 19th century. This fortune teller includes two hat pins among her ornaments, headed in brass and in pearl.



37b. Beadwork tray. Apart from the faces every detail is as bright and vividly distinct as when Sarah Gurnall named and dated it August 24, 1659. Each detail of the border bears close inspection.



38a. 17th-century panel, composed entirely of beads, dated 1657. Its bright colours justify them ker's claim "NATVRS FLOWERS SOON DOE FADE FVL LONG WE LAST CAUSE ART VS MADE".



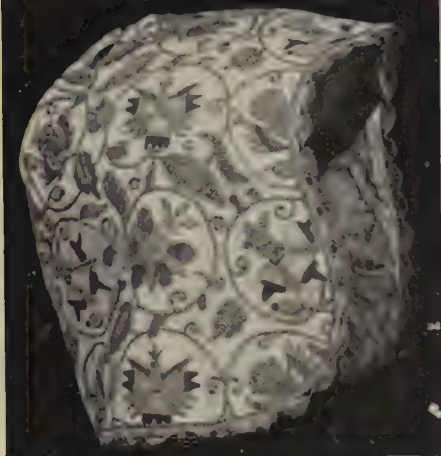
38b. In contrast to the work illustrated above, this panel, also of the second half of the 17th century, achieves a relief effect with beads sewn to a satin ground. Even the faces are of beads. Straight lines are avoided and the beads suggest mosaic work. The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is surrounded by lively details of magpie and jay and thieving fox.



39. *Top left and right* : bead-covered purses of the second quarter of the 17th century. That on the left is leather covered with glass beads threaded on brown silk, the acorns in opaque yellow and green on a ground of clear reddish purple. The inscription reads: HEARE ET IS HIT OR MISS. That on the right, in similar colouring, is dated 1634 with the inscription: I PRAY GOD TO B MY GUIDE. *Centre*: an 18th-century beadwork watch pocket (right) and examples of 19th-century work — bag, necklace and watch guard. The necklace has panels of flowers against white grounds linked by strands of pale blue beads; the watch guard carries the Garter motto. *Bottom*: stocking or miser purses, late 18th and 19th centuries. The purse was carried by the centre which contains a slit opening between the rings. By sliding either ring this opening allows access to the money.



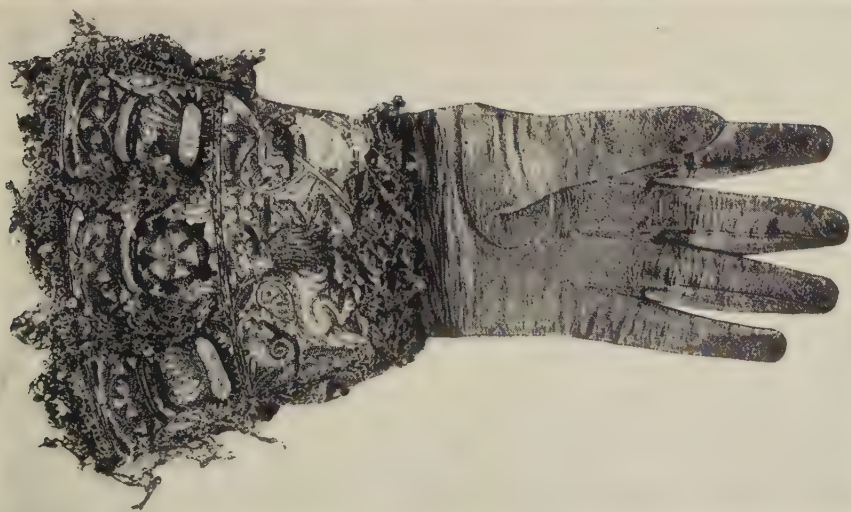
40. Portrait of Margaret, wife of Francis Laton of Rawdon (1579–1662). She wears an embroidered tunic and cap, an apron of filmy lawn ornamented with cut work and surface embroidery, a belt masking its gathered waistband. *Right*: the early 17th-century linen tunic worn in the portrait, the pattern of coiling stems in braided metal thread supporting flowers and leaves and an occasional bird and snail in coloured silks. *Below left*: woman's jacket, 26 in. long, late 16th century, offering an excellent example of the coiling stem pattern beautifully worked in metal threads and silk on linen in chain stitch and button-holing, the colours including blue-violet, pale blue, emerald, pale green, orange yellow, pale yellow, olive brown, pink, crimson. *Below right*: embroidered dress details of the mid-18th century showing the heavier work required on the stomacher and a plainly quilted petticoat which would be masked by a decorative apron to set off the Chinese embroidered satin of the gown.



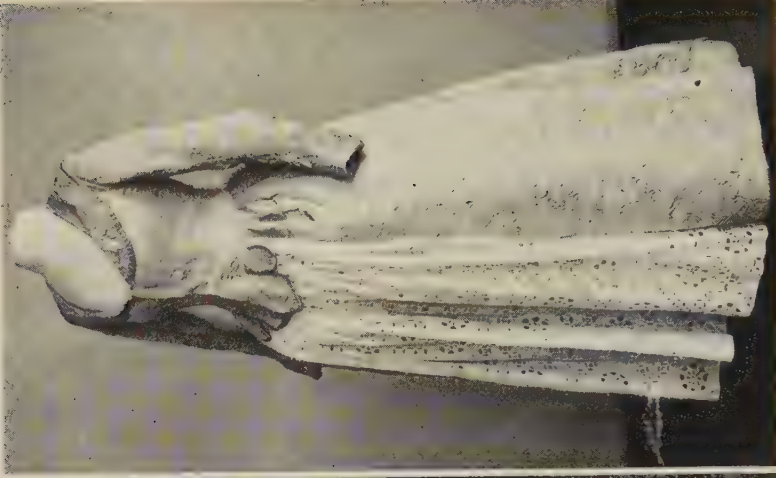
41. Late 16th-century coifs and caps. *Top left*: woman's coif cut in the usual style of its day with a central seam along the crown and an edging of metal thread lace. *Top right*: man's "night cap" for informal wear closely covered with embroidery. The hexagonal diaper and the enclosed floral sprigs are in silver-gilt thread edged with black silk, achieving an effect of great richness despite the usual "pudding" shape. *Below*: triangular forehead cloth and the coif—not made up—to be worn with it. The heavily braided coils contain daffodils in a vividly sunny effect enhanced by great use of spangles.



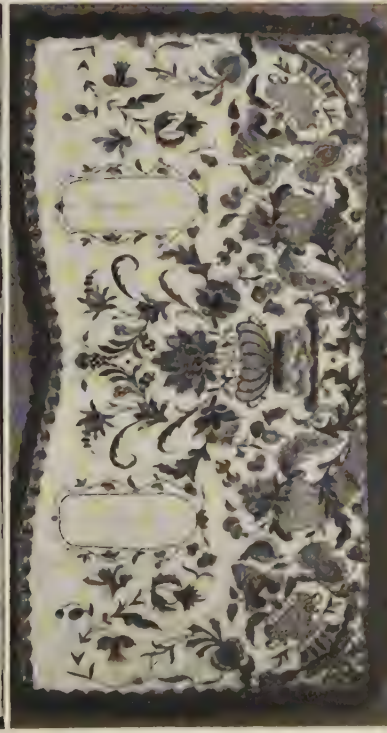
42. Decorative smocks of the early 19th century. *Top*: a linen wedding smock from Warwickshire of about 1840, deeply smocked on yoke, shoulder and sleeve and lavishly embroidered in chain and feather stitches. 42 in. long $\times$ 60½ in. wide including the sleeves. *Below*: cotton twill from Berkshire showing the gusseted sleeve pattern and including two pockets. 39 in. long $\times$ 61½ in. wide.



43. Leather gloves with embroidered satin gauntlets. *Upper left*: 13 in. long, the red satin gauntlet embroidered with silver-gilt and silver thread and with more silver-gilt stitching along the backs of the finger seams. 17th century. *Upper centre*: gauntlet covered in white satin scalloped and embroidered with flowers in coloured silks, silver-gilt thread and spangles. About 1600. *Upper right*: woman's glove, the square-lobed gauntlet embroidered over plum-coloured satin, mainly in couched silver-gilt thread and seed pearls. Second quarter of the 17th century. *Below*: elaborate ornament in silks, silver-gilt thread and masses of seed pearls, with crowned roses and thistles on the tabs and lion, lamb and two snails below. Early 17th century.



44. *Left*: portrait in the style of Isaac Oliver probably of Frances, Countess of Essex. This is fascinating painting to an embroiderer, the details including embroidered lace-trimmed tunic, long full apron, red and gold brush handle, embroidered pincushion under the folding looking glass and red and white cover on the dressing table. *Centre*: early Georgian embroidered apron, the scalloped outline and heavy flower heads ensuring that it dominates the damask dress and quilted petticoat. *Right*: delicate white embroidery might take the place of expensive lace. Despite its fullness this apron achieves a light, fresh effect, its restrained ornament harmonising with that of the quilted satin dress.



45. Short aprons worn for their splendid decorative effect in the 18th century. *Upper left*: ornamented with the delicacy of the porcelain artist, in soft floss silks, mainly in satin stitch and French knots. *Upper right*: showing the tying strings threaded through the top hem. When worn these would gather the soft silk fabric very closely at the wearer's waist. *Lower left*: the short apron at its richest, the fantastic flowers worked in vivid silks and silver-gilt thread set off by gilded lace. *Lower right*: clever embroidery design here contributes to the effect of the scalloped outline which in any case is emphasised by the waist gathering. Coloured silks and silver-gilt thread on a ground of white silk.



46. *Upper left*: early 17th-century purse or bag with a pincushion matching the main ornament. In silk and silver thread worked on canvas in tent stitch and chain stitch with plaited draw strings. $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. $\times$ $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. *Upper right*: Bag and purse, the bag, $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. square, with flower and grapes motifs worked in silk and metal threads in tent, gobelin and plaited braid stitches, the purse 3 in. $\times$ $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. shaped as a bunch of grapes, mainly buttonholed, dividing in half to show a small draw-string bag. Early 17th-century. *Lower left*: back of a book dated 1644, comparable with the bags above and probably carried in one, the familiar flower, bird and butterfly motifs worked in tent stitch against a background of silver thread. *Lower right*: 19th-century bag worked in beads, meticulously neat and full of rich colour, bead-fringed and fitted with a mount and chain of steel.



47. The embroiderer at work. *Above*: two pieces of linen canvas, early 17th century, worked in silks with motifs scattered at random, to be cut out and applied to dress or furnishing fabrics: some have been noted, for instance, on satin bed "furniture" at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, arranged in rows and outlined with metal thread. *Lower left*: part of a mirror frame, unfinished, in raised work. Unworked portions, such as the kneeling figure's head and hands and the head and shoulders below, are drawn in full detail on the white satin. *Lower right*: part of an early 19th century quilt showing a centrepiece printed specially for the embroiderer's use marking George III's jubilee.



48. *Above:* thimbles in South Staffordshire enamels delicately painted with flowers and country scene and narrowly rimmed with gilt metal, flanking a pair in silver ornamented with wide bands of filigree. *Below:* a finely fitted workbox typical of the best early 19th-century craftsmanship, the lift-out tray containing dolphin handled scissors, needlecase, thimble, pearl bodkin and silk winders, spools, pincushion, cut glass scent flask. The box is of alabaster with ormolu mounts and has a musical box in the base.

bed hangings embroidered in a floral pattern, in gold and silver and coloured silks, and pillows and coverlet continue the theme.

Best of all among the ornamental pillows there are richly satisfying quilted covers of the late Stuart days, matching the bed coverlets. These may be worked on only two thicknesses of fabric, fine linen on view and coarse linen or cotton under it. The quilting consists of small lozenges, shells or wandering lines in back stitch in bright yellow silk. Sometimes these have flowing chain stitch flowers among the quilting, yellow, too, in some early work but later in all colours. A very beautiful set in the collection of the Hon. Mrs. Ionides consists of a coverlet and three pillow beres notable for the tawny shades of their embroidery worked over creamy quilted linen and for the elaboration of their stitchery in long-and-short, split and satin stitches, laid and couched work and fillings of French knots. Occasionally the embroidery is in the more solid, surface-covering style associated with the early 18th-century aprons. But by the 1750s the fashion for pillow ornament was virtually over, although Mrs. Bury Palliser in 1869 noted a continuance in French trousseaux of her day.

Chapter Ten

CUSHIONS

CUSHIONS were infinitely more numerous and important in Tudor and Stuart homes than many people realise today, not only for the best bed but for every part of the house. Even small homes tended to count them by the dozen. Among the rich they might include ornate daytime pillows, long and square cushions as part of the bed furniture, mentioned in wills from as early as the 14th and 15th centuries ("cushions and banncoves that longen to the bed aforesaid", 1434); long leaning cushions for the back of the settle, windowseat and wall bench; small book cushions, even standish cushions, as well as the more obvious flat cushions for dining stool and armchair, and the squabs that filled the webbing seats in the pommelled X chairs of ultimate Tudor comfort.

All these offered opportunities for lavish ornament. Some were professional, as when Princess Mary Tudor in 1509 rode to the coronation in a litter furnished with four large cushions of cloth of gold embroidered with fleurs-de-lys or when every chamber at the Field of the Cloth of Gold contained "great cushyns of riche worke of the Turkey making". Professional embroiderers were employed too when the Ironmongers' Company in 1563 ordered twelve cushions in silk and crewel "with the company's arms wrought in every of them".

Far more, however, were amateur work, small enough to encourage the needlewoman to experiment and enjoy her work. Cushions are first among the women's "pretty devices to adorn houses" mentioned in Burton's *Anatomie of Melancholy*: only the real enthusiasts tackled the vaster projects in embroidered furnishings. Cushions were ideal

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as home-made gifts. Queen Elizabeth I received many as new year gifts, such as one from Mrs. Skipworth worked with black silk and fringed with gold and purple and another from Lady Crofts "embrawdred with silke of sundry collors with thistory of Icorus, lyned with changeably taphata and iiij buttons with tassells of silk of sondry collors", which would project from the corners. Elizabeth herself gave her governess a cushion she had worked with ER in silk and wool tent stitch and cross stitch, and Paul Hentzner in 1598 noted at Windsor a cushion "most curiously wrought by Elizabeth's own hand".

Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, even while a princess, preferred to pay for the embroidery of her gift cushions and her accounts make numerous references to the costs involved: 20s. for embroidery gold; 10s. for damask lining (that is the underside of the cushion) and fringe; 5s. for a pattern to be drawn "by my Lady Derby's servant"; 4s. 3d. for feathers for two cushions; 32s. to an embroiderer "for working in her graces cosshen". She herself received many gifts of cushion cloths from her friends.

Such references indicate something of the style of the cushions in fashion before 1600. Long cushions for settles, including bed-settles, benches and window seats usually measured about 3 ft. x 1 ft. 6 in. and square cushions 18 or 20 inches square, allowing an inch or two for turnings in the selvedge-to-selvedge width of the fabric. All manner of fabrics were used—cloth of gold, silks, velvet, the piled woollen Turkey work, gilded leather, and most especially a coarse linen "cushion canvas" such as was priced at 10d. to 1s. a yard in the 1640s. Thus Marketon, Derbyshire, in 1545 had two cushions "wrowght with cruell uppon canvas with Rooses, stuffyd with fethes, viijs". These may have been placed on the two forms which, according to the inventory, were joined to the great standing bedstead in the great chamber.

Corner ornaments known as buttons were supplemented by tassels and fringes—typically "knoppis with tassells of red silks and Venysse golde". Henry in 1546 granted a special permit to two Florentine merchants to import all

manner and sorts of fringes and passements wrought with gold or silver or otherwise. Coloured braids date from the 1570s onward.

The fashion was to leave the underside of the cushion plain: it was "lined" or "bottomed" with some inferior fabric. The Earl of Shrewsbury at Sheffield Castle had a magnificent array of cushions in silk, silver embroidery, tapestry, fringed and tasselled, and even twelve mourning cushions of black cloth, but nearly all were bottomed with the inferior silk and cotton mixture known as satin of Bruges.

For ornament on the richer cushions, even well into the 17th century, the most obvious treatment was applied work. Vigorous, scrolling strapwork patterns could be cut out in velvet, or motifs could be embroidered on soft linen canvas and then cut out and applied. A linen cushion could be worked all over in tent stitch or cross stitch and the popular long-armed cross stitch in wool with touches of more costly silk so that the result suggested tapestry. As to patterns, they followed the rich style of their day, the love of crowded detail peculiarly suiting the cushion's limited area and avoiding the blank spaces that would quickly show wear. Most interesting perhaps are the emblem motifs of Tudor erudition and the armorial cushions with their heraldic motifs framed in rich clusters of homely flowers.

Henry VIII's many cushions in such rich fabrics as purple, green, crimson and tawny cloth of gold and needlework in gold and silk included, for instance, a velvet chair cushion bearing applied embroideries of roses, portcullises and sunbeams. But many, many more cushion patterns consisted merely of rows of flowering plants following herbal woodcut outlines or single flowers set in geometrical diapers. A fine example of this is at Cogenhoe Church, Northampton (Fig. 23, centre), the flower slips divided by elaborate interlacing with a scale border and narrow fringe.

By the beginning of the 17th century human figures, animals and birds were taking their place in pictorial scenes instead of merely filling in the abhorred blank spaces. Thus Lady Shrewsbury's inventory of Hardwick made in 1601 refers to a long cushion in silk and crewel "of the storie of

the sacryfyce of Isak". Hardwicke Hall's "Judgment of Solomon" cushion—the characters of course in Elizabethan dress—includes a representation of a handsomely tasselled cushion under the disputed baby. This, too, is listed in the Countess of Shrewsbury's inventory: "a long quition of needlework of silk and cruell of the storie of the Judgement of Salamon". Some cushions may be compared with the bed valance ornament. Many illustrate Biblical incidents, including many gold embroidered book cushions, but occasionally a topical theme may be noted, such as one in the Lady Lever Art Gallery showing the defeat of the Armada and the frustration of the Gunpowder Plot. Some cushions in raised work (Chapter 13) caricatured the more formal strap-work relief effects of the period's professional embroiderers. Some served as book rests, the embroidery sometimes backed with parchment lest it lose its pictorial value.

Thus 17th-century cushions demonstrated the two main embroidery trends. They might be in smooth, all-covering tent stitch, self-effacing as quilting and with an equal need of perfect needlecraft, whether in silks or in wool, perhaps with a background of silver thread. Or they might be in flamboyant variety of stitches in the manner of stump work, applied to a ground of white satin.

Professional work included a tremendous quantity of woollen pile turkey work. The old Livery Companies frequently ordered such cushions to furnish their halls, which might be let for weddings, dancing lessons and so on. The Cutlers' Company's new hall built in 1677 after the Great Fire had 17 chairs and stools and a large couch with turkey work upholstery: these replaced the 12 old cushions "with oliphants" and the two banckers 7 yards by $\frac{3}{4}$ yard mentioned in a 16th-century inventory, the elephant and castle being the cutler's device.

By the later years of the 17th century when cane furniture was established this could be combined with cushions in really comfortable chairs and daybeds. But by then the height of luxury was the "buffet easy" overstuffed armchair: among the nobleman's furnishings the cushion had lost its dominant role. The king's necessity was become the merchant's minor luxury.

In 1590 Catherine, daughter of the Earl of Westmorland, referred in her will to her "cowtche of clothe of gold" but the daybed was largely a 17th-century development. This required a mattress—in velvet appliqué, perhaps, and probably fringed—and a set of graduated cushions, bolster, pillow, and square in shape. Chippendale in 1754 described the big sofa's set of cushions: "Bolster and Pillow at each end and Cushions at the back, which may be laid down occasionally and form a mattress". Other loose cushions were still needed on window seats as noted in 1700 by Celia Fiennes in Mr. Ruth's house where "all the windows in all the rooms had cusheons". But cushions largely relegated to the role of less than essential luxuries lost their rich glory of fabric and wealth of imaginative embroidery. Gone were the gold and spangles: lively Biblical scenes gave way to heavy-going pastorals on grounds of sarcenet rather than satin, and stitches were soon reduced to the somewhat tedious and often badly executed satin stitch and long-and-short stitch aided by tiresome French knots.

Fortunately this is not the whole picture. Cushions were still required to match bed hangings in splendid crewel work. The order for bed furniture sent out by the East India Company in 1683 (page 122) stipulated "each bed to have 12 cushions for chairs of the same work". There were lively tent stitch cushions, too, with pictorial centres set among big floppy flowers. By now tent stitch might be grounded in more quickly worked cross stitch, the long-armed cross stitch achieving a twilled effect. Broad braids of silk and metal galons were as effective as the earlier fringes.

Bead cushions were made too, the beads threaded and then couched on the fabric in pictorial effects, stiff and improbable as mosaics and altogether different from the "Berlin patterns" later worked in straight lines of beads (see Chapter 15).

In the early 18th century there was some armorial work, some reproduction of Biblical scenes in combinations of tent stitch and the short upright stitches forming simple diaper patterns that are known as cushion stitches. Some attenuated chinoiserie designs may be noted and flowers grouped in vases and baskets.

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Applied work was used for cushion covers in the late 18th century. Mrs. Delany designed a set for the queen at Windsor with satin leaves in various browns shaded with embroidery and mounted on a dark blue ground. More patchwork and applied work cushions are associated with the vogue for patchwork coverlets in the first years of the 19th century (Chapter 11). By then some cushions were being worked quite charmingly in tent stitch in the crewels or the soft fleecy merino wool introduced in the later 18th century, set in cross stitch grounds that could be worked during the long hours of candlelight. Patterns included occasional classical motifs and the currently popular style of chubby amorini in pale pinks and greys associated with china ornament. Flower groups are sometimes spoilt by the lack of any background over the now somewhat dingy looking linen, but others have the crisp charm of sprigged cretonnes. Chenille was shaped into flower bouquets and sewn on to fine linen, again without any background stitchery, but has lasted better when framed as screen and picture. But any reference to 19th-century cushion embroideries tends to be dominated by the cross stitch work on meshed canvas recalling one of the most strident periods in English colour scheming.

Chapter Eleven

QUILTING AND PATCHWORK

EVER since the old Crusaders left their womenfolk to long months and years of troubled idleness quilting has proved gracious testimony to their ability to possess their souls in patience and transform their restless imaginings into exquisite stitchery.

Gay, flippant embroideries have always caught men's fancy. Quilting is for women's admiration: it is necessity transformed into an elaborate, mannered, almost pedantically exquisite art form. Old records, books, early magazines of embroidery and dress make only scant mention of quilting. Yet it flourished among all the golds and silks of Medieval England, and it is still proudly practised, as a living, mother-to-daughter craft, in small regions of North-east England and South Wales today.

Always quilting has been a background exercise to showier complexities of stitch and colour. But it is significant that when domestic embroidery emerged as a widespread household delight in the increasingly rich and stable Elizabethan England, the homes that were beautified with ornamental needlework were usually those that listed "twilts" among their bedding. And in late Stuart days, when the very ribbons on men's clothing were lace-edged and embroidered, then, too, quilted apparel was in the height of favour. Those who proffer the profusion of bright, clever stitchery in the pictorial stumpwork of post-Restoration schoolgirls as that period's major embroidery effort tend to overlook the fact that the late 17th century was one of the great periods for quilting, in the greatest possible contrast to such work, the quietest, but surely the supreme expression of the needlewoman's devotion to her craft.

With every stitch the same, with any single stitch able to ruin the essential uniform inconspicuousness of the whole, quilting was never a task for girlhood enthusiasm. It requires the worker to possess the quiet confidence of long experience in the exacting demands of real needlework to undertake even a minor exercise. It is significant, however, that even in school-child samplers of the 17th and 18th centuries the basic quilting stitches were to the fore, and even in samplers the tendency was for a gradual deterioration in quality.

The whole craft of quilting depends upon the skill, the near perfection, with which back or running or double running stitch is executed over and over again. By definition a quilt consists of two layers of woven fabric held together by lines of stitching passing through the whole. *Contre pointe*—the back stitch of quilting—gave the names counterpoint, counterpane, counterpart to bed coverlets in the 15th century and onwards, and the craft has always been most especially associated with the piece of bed furniture, essentially warm, light, inexpensive. Alternative names include twilts and oversea (oversewn) coverings. Very frequently but by no means invariably the two layers of fabric contain an interlining of soft quilting cotton, wool, down or other substance greatly increasing its value for warmth or protective padding. Such an interlining made the stitching even more important and at the same time gave added emphasis to the patterns.

That the stitchery should take on the satisfying lines of masterly design was only to be expected when fine needlewomen were given such an opportunity for self-expression. Some of the loveliest designs are geometrical—intersecting lines, quatrefoils, circles and the like—and others are elaborate floral arabesques. Feather designs grace downy bed coverlets, and twisted ropes, running vines, tulip groups and baskets of flowers are often noted. Always, as in the 16th century's blackwork, the beauty depends on graceful linework but here emphasised by the mass effects of the shadowy undulations whose intensity was determined by the wide or narrow spacing of the stitchery. The creation of the design, the actual paper work with compasses and

ruler, is sometimes underestimated. It is entirely understandable that a schoolmaster should be called upon for such a job, as Walter Gale of Mayfield recorded in his journal, December 1750: "I finished the bed quilt after five days' close application. It gave satisfaction and I received 10s. 6*d.* for the drawing."

All those stitches were there, however, because it was essential to ensure the requisite smooth union of fabric and lining or even distribution of the interlining. At the same time it provided body to the homely wool, linen or cotton, pliant but sturdy, through the medieval, Tudor and Stuart eras of massively splendid fabrics, and even during the 18th century's excursions into chintzy linens and cottons whose heavy linings tended to make mockery of their seeming airy grace.

Usually the upper fabric in a quilt is of better quality than the underlining. Typical among the Earl of Northampton's many quilts in richly furnished rooms in 1614 were those of crimson taffeta or poppinjay green sarcenet lined with blue calico. Sometimes instead of the usual interlining there was soft cord or candlewick to create ridges between close parallel lines of stitching. This was long called Italian quilting: the cord was either tacked in shape to the lower fabric before the top was stitched over it, or else poked and pulled between the rows of stitching when the quilt was made. It is particularly effective when worked entirely in white linen and was popular in the 18th century.

A bed covering might be ventilated and by modern standards made more hygienic by punched or eyelet embroidery, incorporated in the design—sometimes augmented by complementary surface ornament of French knots—and in fact greatly enriching the design, like touches of stipple in a line engraving. This finish is to be noted too on such articles of dress as the woman's quilted stomacher. But more often the final touch consists merely of surface embroidery or the applied patchwork popular in England from early in George III's reign. It is impossible not to share something of the delight, the sense of achievement, that must have accompanied this excursion into sheer enjoyment after the arduous work of necessity was completed. But

often, of course, even such embroidery work was professional, executed in the chain stitch most nearly allied to the quilting work itself.

One of the oldest wisps of quilting in existence in England today is not a bed coverlet but a jupon, hung above the Black Prince's tomb in Canterbury Cathedral. This close-fitting coat with short sleeves is of velvet, once crimson and blue, on a background of fine calico or buckram, the whole quilted longitudinally—gamboised—and further enriched with embroidery worked on linen and attached to the velvet, bearing the royal arms of England in gold. Quilting might be worn over the armour to bear the heraldic badges that would identify friend from foe, or under the armour to ease the heavy pressure of the metal. The Earl of Northumberland wore two "armyng partlets of white satin quilted and lined with linen under his harnis" at the battle of Terouenne. In days of bow-and-arrow warfare quilting might serve instead of costly steel protection. In 1592 Wyerley noted this in his *Armorie*, but declared that against gunfire "no hardened steel, no quilt, could make resist".

Henry VII's daughter, Princess Mary Tudor, who married Louis XII, had footmen attired in white cloth of gold quilted with scales, and quilted clothing receives mention from time to time throughout the 16th century as when Elyot in 1533 recorded "I did throwe away my quylted cappe". This might have displeased Andrew Boorde whose *Compendyous Regyment or Dietary of helth* in 1542 urged that one's night cap—and it appears that he really meant a cap to be worn in bed—should be of scarlet, "made of good thick quilt of cotton, or else of pure flocks or of clean wool, and let the covering of it be of white fustian". Eden in 1555 wrote that "the men's apparall is double and quilted", and again in 1623 T. Goad mentioned a quilted cap in *Doleful Even Song*: "Hee put vpon his head a red quilt cap, hauing a linnen white one vnder it."

It must be stressed, however, that this was probably plain quilting, developed at a period when underclothing was beginning to receive more consideration and its elaboration included the use of some of the vast quantities and many

qualities of lace characteristic of late 16th- and 17th-century England. Stubbes in 1583 accounted for this love of quilting as part of the technique employed by the rich to emphasise their leisured status in contrast to the needs of labourers: hence its frequent application to rich fabrics where it emphasised their sheen or lit them with glittering facets. Doublets, declared Stubbes, "are no less monstrous than the rest of their garments; for now . . . being so hard quilted, and stuffed with four, five or six pounds of bombast at the least, and sewed, as they can neither walk nor yet will play in them, through excessive heat . . ." Sir John Harrington put it another way: "We goe brave in apparell that wee may be taken for better men than wee bee; we use much bumbastings and quiltings to seem fitter formed, better shouldered, smaller waisted, fuller thyght than we are . . ."

Simple lozenge and vermicular patterns in quilting continued extremely popular through the later 17th and early 18th centuries, the majority of the earlier examples being in yellow silk on a white ground, although by the 18th century more were in white silk. Some were over-embroidered in yellow or in multicoloured patterns. It has been noted that much elaborate chain stitch and back stitch embroidery in yellow silk was imported into England and Holland at this period and may have prompted this remarkably widespread work, noted as early as 1614 when the Earl of Northampton had "a China quilt stitched in chequer work with yellow silk the ground white". From a craftsman's viewpoint the vermicular work represents quilting at its most nearly lazy and in no way to be compared with such exquisitely meticulous work as the formal patterns in back stitch in red silk on a white linen jacket of the mid-17th century in Lord Middleton's collection. Fabric inexpertly embroidered with a sparse sprig pattern lost its creased or puckered look when given diaper or vermicular enrichment: one is reminded of the wood carver's recourse to a punched or matted background.

In the Victoria and Albert Museum is an example of more elaborate quilting applied to clothing such as reached its heyday in the thirty or forty years around 1700. The man's doublet and breeches in white linen quilted in back stitch

(Fig. 25) can be dated to about 1635. The elaborate but colourless diaper pattern provides the perfect foil for the man's gorgeously embroidered sword hangers and glove gauntlets. Quilted night caps for men to wear on informal occasions when they removed their hot wigs continued popular in the 18th century, and towards the middle of the century many a smart morning waistcoat was quilted under its highly professional embroidery. Quilting may form the background to all-white embroidery with attractive texture effects including clusters of tiny French knots like encrustations of pearls. As for women's wear, a contemporaneous writer described London in the first half of the 17th century as a paradise for married women, many of whom devoted themselves to "worldliness, bombastings, quiltings, perfumes and corked shoes", and this love of quilted dress accessories increased towards the century's end.

Those who could not afford fur petticoats under velvet gowns continued to wear lovely quilted petticoats even as late as the accession of George III in 1760. The cheapest were simply quilted in running stitch on coarse linen. Richardson's Pamela, a maid visiting her country parents, chose clothing to suit her status including two quilted petticoats of good sad-coloured stuff and a good camblet quilted coat. But the richest were back stitched in colourful silk diapers and quite elaborate flower patterns and border panels, often over-embroidered with silks and metal threads. Skirt and petticoat were frequently in contrasting colours. There were quilted stomachers, quilted mittens, mostly in the familiar yellow and white work. The *London Gazette* in 1676 advertised the theft of a quilted nightgown—that is a gown for informal house wear. But as indication of the period's absorption in this persuasive work one may best refer to the existence of dolls' quilted clothing, exquisitely worked in interlacing quatrefoils, circles, intersecting lines—all the delicate grace of a quilted coverlet expressed, for example, in a bodice $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long.

The shrewd Lady Grisell Baillie bought quilting by the yard for her daughters' clothing in the early 18th century. But it is easy to imagine she had more executed at home by the household staff, for even the early-rising dairy maids

had to be kept busy until nine o'clock each night. White Indian quilting, 27 yards of it, at 4s. 6d. and 5s. 6d. a yard cost her £4 13s. 6d. sterling in 1717, when she bought 27 yards of black velvet for a coat and gown at 17s. a yard for her daughter Grisie. Linings for gowns were customary: she often referred to them and to the cleaning of gowns without their linings. But mainly her preoccupation seems to have been with quilting to make warm, windproof coats and there are further references in her household accounts to such items as a white satin quilted coat costing £2 15s. 0d. and a yellow pertian (thin plain silk) quilted coat, £1 15s. 0d.

Her daughter Rachie's baby appears to have had nearly £200 expended on clothes, bed linen and the rest, including a specially quilted gown. Such references emphasise the amount of professional quilting that was worked side by side with the homely amateur creations. Then, and only then, may one question the value of so many stitches, paid for in some instances on the basis of the thread used rather than the area covered so that the worker was tempted to take forty or fifty stitches to the inch.

There is further reference to the sale of quilting by the yard in W. Gordon's *General Counting House*, 1766. One use for such fabric was as a lining for coach interiors. But fabric diagonally patterned to suggest arduous quilting was also sold at this time. By the 1790s a quilting machine had been devised as one of the earliest mechanical aids for the English needlewoman.

Professional quilters were at work even before Newbery's reference to them in 1563 as associating with embroiderers and tailors. Some were specialists, such as Michael Scott of Fetter Lane, London, quilt maker, mentioned in the *London Gazette*, 1709, and Jane Ellis of Chancery Lane, in 1710, maker of quilted petticoats. Upholsterers' trade cards as late as the 1780s continued to refer to quilted bed furniture. A curious advertisement regarding professional quilting was issued by Thomas Nash, upholsterer, of Holborn Bridge, 1722: "Whereas by an Act passed the last session of Parliament no callicoe Furniture can be made up after Christmas next under Penalty of Twenty Pounds: This is to inform those that have Occasion for Beds of the Finest Chince

Patterns, Callicoe Quilts, Carpets to cover one side of callicoe Gowns to make into Quilts, may be furnished with all sorts by Thomas Nash." (*The Post Boy*, November 15, 1722.)

Some details of the professional work are given in *The London Tradesman*, 1747, which states that quilted petticoats "are made mostly by Women, and some Men, who are employed by the Shops and earn but little. They quilt likewise Quilts for Beds for the upholder. This they make more of than the Petticoats, but nothing very considerable, nothing to get rich by, unless they are able to purchase the materials and sell them finished to the Shops, which few of them do. They rarely take apprentices, and the Women they employ to help them, earn Three to Four Shillings a Week and their Diet". (This may be compared with the standard rate of 2s. 6d. a square foot for fine quilting quoted by Miss Averil Colby for the revived home industry, 1929-39.) This somewhat sorry picture is given added emphasis by such passing comments as one in the *Annual Register*, 1765, "This will only be taking the bread from the poor quilters".

There was little demand for bed quilts in the years 1800 to 1830 but the professional craft continued throughout the 19th century. The light clothing of the Regency required many a quilted silk pelisse, and the huge gowns of early Victorian fashion were most easily made warmer with capes of quilted wool. Quilted petticoats were so warm and draught-proof that they never really went out of use and by the mid-19th century scarlet ones were highly popular once more. One variant was down-filled, like a bed eiderdown, warm, light and contributing to the desirable full lines of the skirt. Quilting was shown at the Great Exhibition, and in 1879 there was still work available and the *Daily Chronicle* could advertise "Quilters wanted for infants' cloaks".

To most people, however, quilting is especially associated with bed coverlets. Here was quilting worked as a necessity, as a cheap, home-produced alternative to contemporaneous coverlets of miniver and ermine. Records of Medieval England offer frequent reminders that even the rich houses tended to be dark, draughty places. Originally, it has been suggested, the quilts served as mattresses, and references to

under-quilts, in contrast to "covering quilts", may be noted. In the very detailed Northampton inventory a bed in the lodge in the park at Greenwich had a quilt of crimson taffeta to suit the bed hangings, but also a down bed, a bolster, a feather bed and "one quilte or wool bed" to support the sleeper. Alternative in a rich bed was a second feather bed to lie upon. Servants' quarters had feather bed and bolster, blankets and rugs, but no quilts. Under-quilts continued to appear in the 18th century records, as in the Dyrham inventory, 1710.

Among early 14th-century records of decorative over-quilts mention is made in the *Romance of Arthur of Lytel Brytayne* of a "rich quylt wrought with coten, with crimson sendel silken stuff stitched with thredes of golde . . ." *Sir Beves*, written in about 1320, commented on "foure honded beds of silk echon. Quilts of gold there are upon". The Durham Priory inventory of 1466 included a quilt embroidered with the four Evangelists, such as often appear in the later cradle quilts. Elizabethan inventories are usually disappointingly vague about their households' many quilts but one catches occasional glimpses of their splendour, such as "a faire quilte of crymson sattin", belonging to the Earl of Leicester in 1584. This was "vi breadths iij yards 3 quarters naile deep [a nail measuring $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches], all lozanged over with silken twists, in the midst a cinquefoil with a garland of ragged staves, fringed rounde aboute with a small fringe of crimson silke, lyned through with white fustian", a coarse twilled cotton cloth suggestive of velveteen.

Paul Hentzner in his *Travels in England* marvelled at the beds at Windsor in 1598 including the state beds of Edward VI, Henry VII and Henry VIII, all eleven feet square and covered with quilts shining in gold and silver. William Jenson, a Newcastle merchant, in 1587 possessed a "twilte" worth 6s. 8d. among his considerable household embroideries. At Hardwick in 1601 the wardrobe contained a "quilte of chaungeable taffetic sarcenet" and one of "yellow India stuffe embroidered with birds and beastes and white silk frenge and tassells".

Quilted pillow cases are more difficult to explain in terms

QUILTING AND PATCHWORK

of necessity even in days when cushions and pillows received much sumptuous embroidery and when they could thus match the quilted coverlet. But it is easy to understand a family with no money to spare for costly materials, where congratulatory visitors at the young mother's bedside would be quick to admire such a dainty creation. Matching quilts and pillows were ornamental daytime luxuries until the 1750s.

The fashion for quilting was so widely accepted by the 1660s that one may even note its inclusion among the small figures ornamenting a stump work casket. An inventory of the king's goods at Whitehall in 1688 mentions a number of "quilts for couches". Some quilting served as an effective ground for applied ornament. Even the bed hangings might be quilted: fine Indian quilting was thus noted by Celia Fiennes on her travels through Britain at the end of the 17th century.

By then the influence of Eastern quilting was everywhere apparent. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu referred in a letter to "fine Indian quilting embroidered with gold" and some of the exquisitely fine coverlets noted today may be work exported from the Dutch East Indies around the beginning of the 18th century, so finely stitched that they suggest printed chintzes. The Portuguese colony of Goa supplied elaborately embroidered coverlets in the 17th century, often back stitched in yellow silk and these may have contributed to the vogue for the yellow vermicular patterns on "Indian quilting". Typical early 18th-century work was the white coverlet quilted in white silk, in a leaf design and colourfully embroidered with flowers and birds in chain stitch on the state bed at Houghton in 1730. Johnson in the *Idler*, 1758, declared "we have three flourish'd quilts for every bed"

Many that remain from the 18th century are of linen, white and quilted in white linen or in silk, or cotton quilted in cotton or linen. Many others are quilted in yellow silk. Sometimes a damask linen was used with great effect, the play of texture enhanced by embroidery such as ventilating punched work. As to patterns, they are indeed fascinating in their quiet complexity. Flowers, more or less formalised, tend to predominate, with many varieties of leaves, fruits

such as pineapples, and more formalised elaborations of circles and interlacings. The rich effect of repetitive curving plumes—the “feathers” pattern—is among those most closely associated with the craft. Hearts are traditional in marriage quilts, and in patchwork too.

It is an essential of the craft that the background must contain more stitchery than the dominant motifs. Many attractive background details may be noted, such as twisted ropes, the shell pattern suggesting overlapping scales, hexagonal honeycombing, concentric squares and diamonds of all sizes including the hobnail and strawberry diamonds of the glass cutter, developed after the glass technique had improved in the last years of the 18th century. Queen Charlotte in 1770 had a quilt of cream satin embroidered with garlands of flowers on her gilt bed in the Adam taste at Hampton Court, and Sophie von la Roche in 1786 at Lord Harcourt’s home noted the bedroom “hung with monotone pale blue chintz with a border of the sweetest flower garlands embroidered in blue of the same shade on a white ground, similarly the curtains, quilts on both beds, and chair covers”.

Inevitably Mrs. Delany made quilted bed coverlets. One made in about 1750 was of white linen “worked in flowers the size of Nature, delineated with the finest coloured silks in running stitch which is made use of in the same way as by a pen etching on paper; the outline was drawn with pencil. Each flower is different and *evidently* done at the *moment* from the original”. Those who depended on professional work could buy bed quilting by the yard. *The Purefoy Letters* 1735-53 record Mrs. Purefoy’s request for “some Patterns of Quilting you mention together with the lowest Price of each Pattern. I shall want enough to make one of the new fashioned Low Beds without a Cornice, if I like the Quilting and the Price I will let you know the Quantity”. She bought 45 yards at 10s. a yard.

The quilting frame like the quilting bee has become so completely associated with the American scene that it may be worth mentioning the use of the frame in England a century earlier. This would hold taut a coverlet or similar large area of fabrics and lining while being quilted together.

The quilting bee, perhaps, has less to recommend it. It is easy to understand, of course, that it might meet a real need. The girl could prepare a great number of quilt tops very inexpensively from patchwork through the years when she was assembling a hope chest: tradition required a baker's dozen. The main expenditure would come when the under-fabric and raw cotton filling were added, so this was postponed until she became engaged. Only a quilting bee could then enable her to be equipped with the necessary quantity of quilts by her wedding day, and incidentally it enabled her friends to express their good wishes and share her happiness with gladly given labour rather than their scanty dollars. One only doubts the quality of the results.

Patchwork has been associated with quilting from very early times: there are occasional Medieval references, as in the *Lai del Desiré* quoted by Marshall where a quilt was made in chequer-wise pieces of different sorts of rich stuffs. But the craft became more popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in New England as well as in Great Britain. Late Victorians with their untidy, childish crazy quilts brought the lovely earlier craft into disrepute. But today the colour-loving admirer of meticulous stitchery is acquiring treasures which seem to reach back into the very heart of the homes that brought them into being.

Tomorrow, probably, such patchworks will be collectors' rarities, but today there is still an occasional chance to obtain for a few pounds a richly individualistic specimen, in the most desirable form of a bed coverlet or quilt. In each individualistic square inch this yet retains something of the airs and graces once belonging to the gowns and furnishings that contributed to its beauty—a timeless beauty that harmonises perfectly with many an uncompromisingly modern furnishing scheme.

The patchwork enthusiast looks further than the obvious possibilities of the quilt. She finds bed hangings of chintz perhaps, or a "carriage rug", or catches a new glimpse of last century's moods among the innumerable minor furnishings that date from the days when patchwork invaded the Victorian drawing room. Here the range is endless, for cushions and pincushions, handscreens and even blinds were

chequered with gay piecings, not only of twills, cretonnes and chintzes but of satin with velvet, or plain with brocaded silks, cut from pieces sold by the pound-bundle by Victorian silk mercers and linen drapers. What matters today to the collector of old patchwork, as to its original creators, is that a specimen should have been designed with an artist's eye for colour and pattern and cut and stitched with a perfection of craftsmanship all too seldom achieved in these present bustling days.

Patchwork is unique in that it offered the hardworking cottage woman as well as the over-leisured ambitiously painstaking girl in her teens an opportunity to revel in colours and textures of fabric far removed from their workaday world—and how they revelled. But, as in the case of so many other home crafts and cottage industries, each specimen must be judged on its merits. Age is seldom easy to establish with certainty unless family records are exceptionally complete, for even the inclusion of an 18th-century printed fabric is inconclusive evidence. In any case it must be accepted that few existing specimens date earlier than the late 18th century, and far more are of the 19th century. An Egyptian queen of Solomon's day might have her funeral tent in a patchwork of gazelle hide fragments, variously dyed and still vividly colourful today, remote forerunner of the minor kid and leather patchworks of the Victorians. But so far as England is concerned it has been impossible to find proof positive for an English emigrant origin for the great patchwork tradition in the United States of America.

Some authorities have tended to consider the later 18th century as the English starting point for this obvious combination of thrift with our inherent native delight in creating brightly coloured, simply composed and fundamentally useful home enrichments. But this overlooks such an early 18th-century reference to the established craft as Swift's in *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726: "My clothes looked like the patch-work made by the ladies in England, only that mine were all of a colour." Nevertheless it was for some one hundred years or so from the late 18th century that the making of patchwork flourished in the home, and its more

recent revival has been in the old tradition respected by all fine needlewomen.

Patchwork bed coverlets tend automatically to be called quilts. When an area of multi-coloured patchwork was introduced as the top layer on a quilted bed cover it might be included in the quilting or, alternatively, the 'superb understatement of pattern' which is the glory of quilting might be restricted to the under layers. The inevitable association between patchwork and quilting is seen time and again in specimens where the patchwork pieces express in colour the familiar designs of the quilters. This applies not only to the interlocking outlines—hexagons, diamonds, shells and the like—but, for instance, to the best known "feathers" quilting motif. This is seen in an exceptionally rich coverlet at the Victoria and Albert Museum, composed of silk, satin and velvet patchwork with a bold border adaptation of the Durham feathers in black and green silk. Another in this Museum demonstrates that even the simplest patchwork of square pieces can be made more interesting by the introduction of quilting over it, in a similar square theme but arranged so that the corners meet in the centre of each square of patchwork.

Miss Averil Colby has pointed out, however, that quilting was out of fashion in the years 1800–30 when many of the finest patchwork coverlets were made, especially in the applied patchwork that made most use of the period's strikingly lovely printed fabrics, before fashion swung back to plainer surfaces and more strident colour contrasts, muted and veiled by the quilting tracery. Inevitably at that time the alternative was over-elaboration of pattern and workmanship.

The first basic requirement of patchwork has always been the transformation of fabric fragments into smooth sheets of material. This is identified today as pieced or mosaic patchwork as distinct from the applied work in which pieces are patched on to a foundation material, dainty chintz or cretonne motifs perhaps being cut out and applied as the highlights to a subdued quilted design. For either achievement to be successful it has always proved necessary to maintain an excessively orderly pattern: the later 19th-

century crazy quilts demonstrated the unwieldy results of trying to combine any heterogeneous collection of fabric pieces without the orderliness of geometric design. Even pictorial effects were attempted by the Victorians, but met with obvious obstacles. Beginners usually found it wise to restrict the shapes of their pieces to straight-edged squares, diamonds, triangles, but today's collector appreciates the way in which the expert demonstrated her skill by combining an assortment of curved shapes, exceedingly difficult to seam together with the perfect flatness required of patchwork.

Whatever the design the method for mosaic patchwork consisted in cutting out a shape for each piece required by the finished design, in fabric and in card or paper. Metal templates ensured uniformity in this all-important preliminary. Each fabric piece was cut with quarter-inch margins, which were turned over the edges of the accompanying card, and fabric and card tacked smoothly together. Ironed flat, the fragments of material could then be sewn to each other without a wrinkle, the whole area being completed before removal of the cards. Occasionally unfinished work is found and the papers—most often old letters—may offer clues to the time and place of its making.

Some workers depended for much of their rich result upon the printed ornament on the patches: even plain squares or hexagons could thus become immensely ornamental. Particularly lovely printed cottons appeared in the late 1820s, the fabric finer than in early pieces. Study of printed fabrics may indicate their approximate date, but requires considerable understanding of ever-changing processes: for the most obvious example, until 1809 the colour green was only achieved by printing or somewhat casual pencilling of yellow—now often faded—over the printed blue. A really good black was a late achievement. The more delicate monochrome line work of copper plate printing did not oust the older wood block method, so that this is no guide to dating. The simplest of sprigged and spotted dress scraps are common, tending to replace furnishing prints by Victorian days. Some attractive floral prints on richly coloured grounds may be associated with a fashion

of the very late 18th and early 19th centuries. But the fabric may have been many years old before being cut up for patchwork.

An exception is the printed centrepiece mentioned by Sheraton and found on many patchwork coverlets made between 1800 and the last years of the Regency. This is the calico printer's craft at its most elaborate. A dozen or more wood blocks may have been used to produce the bird's nest group, the vivid flowers or basket of fruit, on a ground of fine cotton. Collectors attach considerable value to these panels, found also on chair-backs and screens, but they look flat and dull compared with the surrounding stitchery. Such a panel is always worth close examination for it may bear an inscription and date, commemorating, for example, George III's golden jubilee in 1809 with a cryptic "G.50.R" (Fig. 47)—still a frequent find—or the marriage in 1816 of Princess Charlotte, inscribed around the border "Princess Charlotte of Wales married to Leopold Prince of Saxe Cobourg, May 2, 1816". The period was so rich in printed handkerchiefs that there was no lack of suitable pieces, but those intended for bed furniture had border pieces to match.

Other coverlets introduced embroidery stitches to emphasise the leading lines of pattern or a few unifying lines of braid. An occasional mosaic specimen has been noted with printed and embroidered patches cleverly combined. For example, opposing point-to-point triangles in printed fabric may be balanced by similar triangles bearing embroidered motifs so that each two and two make up a square all over the quilt, in what is known as the cotton reel pattern. A specimen of this, including five larger insertions of embroidery in the design, has been dated to 1790.

Triangles and squares may sometimes appear over-rigid but the honeycomb pattern, especially popular from the 1850s, is endlessly attractive, consisting merely of hexagons in a single size. The shell outline suggesting overlapping scales is much more difficult to stitch as curves are involved but only the right choice of colours is required for a most satisfying effect with diamond-shaped patches suggesting a richly colourful array of cubes and immediately recalling

the cube pattern in wood marquetry which was a delightful feature of Regency Tunbridge ware.

The 19th-century patchwork maker had many alternative patterns, however. Today's collector can search the craft publications of the period to identify and name her patterns—straightforward working names such as the box or block, windmill, pincushion, jewel, lozenge, log-cabin. A woman with an eye for colour might plan the ambitious tinted pattern introduced in the second half of the 19th century, using one colour in various tints cut from stiff muslin at a time when it was no longer a matter of shame to buy all one's materials. Hexagons in four tints, for instance, might be arranged in such devices as stars and rosettes, each dark-tinted at the centre and lighter towards the edges. Some very laborious work dates to the later 19th century, built up of squares less than an inch across. The usual finish in the early 19th century was a fringe of linen, but later it might be of heavy yellow silk.

In Victorian days the patches were often edged by running stitches in filoselle, a smooth-working, reasonably glossy silk obtained from the less valuable outer casing of the silkworm cocoon. This was used on patchwork from about 1850. Great quantities were required if much effect was to be achieved with such herringbone or coral stitching. By then pictorial embroidery on individual patches was an occasional diversion, but was more especially a feature of the crazy quilt which often became a highly personal affair, each motif recalling some family anecdote or association. Album quilts were introduced in the 1850s, with autographs and dates indelibly inscribed or stitched on some of the squares.

The crazy quilt was easily made, sewn on to a firm basis of linen or cotton ticking which is entirely hidden by the medley of fabric scraps. These may be cut in every shape and size and overlap each other, the joining lines hidden under herringbone or other decorative running stitches. The pieces themselves are often embroidered, pictorial efforts augmented by patches of *tête-de-bœuf*, *point-de-riz* or similar then-modish filling stitches, with beads, ribbons and other gauds piled upon them.

Not everyone considers that applied work should be included among patchwork, since the basic constructional requirement is lacking and thus it is freed of many of patchwork's restrictions. However it was used for coverlets in the same mood as mosaic patchwork and the same printed fabrics are to be found in both, including the centrepieces and borders sold for the purpose.

Early applied work is to be found with every sort of embroidery. It offered opportunities for bold, clear patterns and could be applied to rich fabrics difficult to stitch in detail so that it lent itself to all manner of church and armorial work, altar frontals, horse trappings and, of course, every kind of major home furnishing. On coverlets the familiar geometrical shapes cut with templates and fitted into borders and formal patterns could be supplemented by pots of flowers, baskets of fruit and other motifs symmetrically arranged. Each motif might be a single patch or each petal in a flower group might be different. Some lovely flower arrangements were achieved, cut from vivid cotton prints and exactly herringboned on to a ground of thicker calico. Sometimes the flower motifs in their own irregular outlines were cut out in their entirety and buttonholed on to the ground, the bright cretonne colours looking effective against black. The appliqué motifs were further secured to the ground by the working of details in silks. But the vogue for masses of small flowers seems to have passed before 1860 in patchwork as in other crafts in favour of more strident use of geometrical outlines.

One final detail in a patchwork may be overlooked. Always there is a chance of a signature, possibly even a date. Some were made by children—mosaic as well as applied patchwork—and as on samplers such prowess had to be recorded, sometimes including the child's age, which may well impress today's collector even more than those who witnessed its accomplishment.

Chapter Twelve

SAMPLERS

SO much attention has been concentrated in recent years on old samplers that it is easy for the modern collector to credit them with a wholly false importance in the lives of those who created them. Once a sampler comes to be regarded as an end in itself, as a work of art rather than of utility, its real purpose and value are quickly lost. That was, in fact, what eventually happened and led to the sampler's decline. Printed books and magazines of needlework stitches became commonplace, the sampler in its earliest role as a treasured repository of stitches no longer necessary. Variety and range of stitchcraft became secondary to pictorial effect and therefore the work largely deteriorated into a child's exercise in neatness and perseverance. There were, however, several distinct stages in the sampler's change of role, and a collection that can illustrate these is a refreshing commentary on society through the centuries it covers.

Whereas other collector's pieces often originated as the prerogatives of the wealthy, samplers are at the very heart of English home life. The older specimens are particularly treasured today because they present, in summarised form, the immense variety of work which their creators were applying on a much greater scale to their clothes and to the furnishings that made Tudor and Stuart homes far less draughtily austere, far richer and more colourful than is generally appreciated.

Reference to a sampler is found as early as 1502 when an ell of linen costing eightpence was bought for Queen Elizabeth of York "for a sampler for the Quene". Edward VI's inventory in 1552 included a parchment book containing "a sampler or set of patterns worked on Normandy

canvas with green and black silks". Towards the end of the century references abound, such as when Thomas Nash in 1592 described a merchant's wife "... she is so finical in her speech, as though she spake nothing but what she had first sewed over before in her samplers . . ."

The few remaining specimens suggest that the general style was a broad rectangle of coarse, loosely woven linen, the arrangement haphazard and the motifs themselves small, isolated notions acquired from herbals, bestiaries and the like, preserved for their value as patterns rather than with any special consideration of the somewhat limited range of stitches used—details of heraldry such as were applied to important bed hangings; the flowers and animals of Elizabethan emblem work; restrictive formal patterns taken from woven ornament; tent stitch work including stiff little figures in Elizabethan dress imitating in texture and subject the costly foreign tapestries of the day. The embroidery was worked in coloured silks, soft and only slightly twisted.

A sampler in the early style at the Victoria and Albert Museum, attributed to the second quarter of the 17th century, includes deer, leopard and lion, parrot and peacock—which does not, as some collectors suggest, prove Scottish origin—snake and caterpillar, and flower "slips" in the herbal woodcut manner. These are in tent stitch, followed by more geometrical but still isolated motifs in rococo stitch. The colours include yellowy greens, bright pink and red, rich blue, mustardy yellow and fawn. Every grape in the bunch has its highlight and some are blue, some pink and some greyish-pink as an attempt at purple. This surely was the kind of pictorial sampler that Shakespeare's Helena and Hermia worked together when they

... created both one flower
Both on one sampler . . .

It is important to remember, however, that much early Tudor and Elizabethan embroidery—flower "slips" and "branches", for example—was worked on linen and cut out to be applied to velvet and other precious fabrics. Sometimes a group of such motifs worked but not cut out is mistaken for an early sampler (Fig. 47).

Regrettably, most of the remaining early samplers are in the style that ousted the Elizabethan miscellany. These are band samplers, the patterns worked in soft silks in neat but too-formal rows across a long, narrow strip of somewhat better quality linen. During the 17th century the whole style became as unreal as the contemporary schoolboy's latin. It appears to have been adapted from Italy, the source of many patterns at this period, with increasing emphasis on line, expressed in running and cross stitches and their variants in patterns associated with carpet work instead of the tapestry effects of tent stitch. Much of this exquisitely fine but dull work far more closely resembles Italian household embroideries of the period than any observable on English dress or furnishings although some fine spidery patterns worked to appear equally perfect on both sides are reminiscent of some ruff and cuff embroidery on contemporary portraits when goffering demanded such perfection of finish and offered little chance of the fabric's long survival. Surface covering stitches include close buttonholing, satin stitch, French knots.

Study of these artificial samplers makes one realise why stump work was so popular. Even when human figures appear on the sampler; they are in a formalistic, un-English style: these odd little men or *amorini* are now vaguely termed boxers, but only too obviously their workers were copying something they did not understand. Perhaps the most likely explanation is that they derived from Italian boys scaring birds from the vines, as shown in Ostau's book of 1561 *La Vera Perfettione del Designo* (Figs. 31, 32).

Some of these band samplers were more than three feet long, but only eight or nine inches wide and could be wound round rolls of parchment or rods of ivory. They would represent brief spells of work spread over many years as from childhood onwards their owners learnt and practised small geometrical devices, formalised flower borders, alphabets, numerals and so on, and recorded them for future reference.

Each section was simply worked across the width of the piece and no attempt was made to design the pattern as a whole. The method was convenient for preserving the

stitchery. Some collectors have assumed that the width of the hand-woven linen governed the width of the sampler but this is incorrect since the selvedge is usually found at top and bottom of the band. The width of the linen thus decided merely the length of the sampler, varying from as little as 18 inches to joined pieces of more than 40.

Even by the early 17th century, however, the first duty of the sampler, as a repository of patterns, was passing. Printed pattern books had come from abroad and English specimens had soon followed (see Chapter 19). Already, therefore, samplers were tending to become pieces on which to try out rather than to store the stitchery applied with immense effect to the clothing of both men and women. *The Needle's Excellency* (10th Edition 1634) in a long pre-fatory poem by John Taylor, refers to the smaller home furnishings on which a girl might try her skill—"handkerchiefs, table-clothes for parlours or for halls, sheets, towels, napkins, pillowbeares . . ." Daytime pillow cases were sometimes richly decorative but even here more probably he was referring to simple making and marking with the alphabets so typically included in 17th- and 18th-century samplers that John Walters in his *English and Welsh Dictionary* (1828), quoted by F. G. Payne, defines a sampler as "a marking Alphabet wrought by girls at school".

Cut and drawn thread work was developed as the vogue for needlepoint laces in costume decoration spread across Europe, and some of the most fascinating samplers are wholly in white work. For some girls this marked the second stage in their needlecraft education. In some long bands one can trace the advance, through coloured borders, to alphabets, then to surface white work, white marking alphabets and numerals, and finally to drawn work and thence to bolder cut work. Some include exquisitely delicate fillings of needlepoint lace. Sometimes one finds name and date on a 17th-century sampler and the alphabets increased as the patterns tended to coarsen during this century, but rarely more than a brief verse of the texts and sentiments that burden many 18th-century specimens. A MS. at the British Museum dated 1651 for braid patterns offers an early version of one of the sampler's most familiar verses:

ENGLISH DOMESTIC NEEDLEWORK

Heare you may see in Letters New
The Love of her that honoreth you . . .
Not the vallyou but the Love
When this you see
Remember me.

Many more samplers of this period must have perished because such a piece was still considered of little more than passing interest to its owner.

By the end of the century both the straightforward band method of presentation and the use of metal threads and cut work motifs had nearly vanished from the sampler, although late specimens with typical Stuart treatment including the Italianate "boxer" figures may date as late as the 1740s. To defy chronological classification transitional specimens exist with dates from the 1650s to the 1740s, showing pictorial groups, the band arrangement and formal diaper work. Some delightful pieces are worked in tent stitch throughout. One in the Duchess of Wellington's collection, dated 1714, has a wonderful display of figures and emblematic animals, ranging from St. George and the dragon to the expulsion from Paradise.

In the early 18th century the standard of living was rising fast. The plentiful use of household linens prompted the appearance of more marking alphabets. At the same time samplers were proving an easy method of teaching children their letters, the dullness of such classroom exercises mitigated by their introduction as verses and sentiments. Yet again, therefore, the sampler's role was changing. Many early marking alphabets were made by piercing tiny holes in the linen and whipping over their edges. Others were worked in flat satin stitch, others in the unambitious but extremely tidy cross stitch that eventually, for this reason, dominated sampler work. Scotland produced some especially ornate alphabets.

Meanwhile, by the 18th century yet another change was becoming evident in the requirements of the sampler. Enduring embroidered upholstery was fashionable and some samplers show the coarser, heavier designs required for this work including the zig-zag flame stitch, but often they display no variety of stitch, being merely repositories

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of the motifs required for the cross stitch upholsteries produced by their makers.

In the later 18th century the establishment of women's magazines with embroidery patterns prompted the making of samplers by adults and in particular the embroidered maps usually called map samplers because some bear the names of workers and their schools. Maps form a collector's sideline of their own, associated especially with the period roughly 1770 to 1830. It has been noted that maps were printed on white satin as early as the late 17th century but nothing suitable for stitchery until the 18th century.

Map samplers offer none of the delights found in old printed maps and in general are somewhat dull with their double outlines in plain stem stitch or chain stitch. Early specimens are usually on white satin or sarcenet, some worked over printed outlines. The country or county outlines are in coloured silks and the names in black sewing silk. Metallic threads were popular in early work. Ornament may include a figure of Britannia in one corner, or a wreath around the map's title or at most a floral border. In 19th-century specimens the material is fine canvas and the names are in cross stitch. The most usual are of England and Wales and of Europe. Some are of the world, some of individual counties, but these are rare. A map was shown at the 1851 Exhibition, measuring 3 ft. x 3 ft. 6 in., worked by a girl of fourteen.

In the main, however, the 18th century's young ladies of fashion who would once have taken a pride in what Thomas Mills in 1613 called "idle samplery or silken follies", contented themselves with minor embroideries and as a result samplers lost much of their importance even as children's tests of extensive skill with the needle. Instead they now tended to constitute a method of impressing manners of neatness and persistence along with pious thoughts and moral maxims upon the young by school teachers, parents and governesses who themselves had little enough to hand on in the way of either scholarship or needlecraft.

Here again samplers throw a fascinating light on the spirit of the times, and are a study in themselves of the lives and manners of the children to whom they became needle

copybooks. Here at last were samplers directly intended for display, and for such a purpose something more elegant was desired than the old arrangement of the band sampler. The shape changed to a broad rectangle suitable for framing. The colours of the silks became brighter and less pleasantly blended, with a delight in reds and greens instead of pinks and blues, and with a casual mixing of colours even in a single letter—until the mid-century spread of “improving” verses led to more use of duller shades, blue, black, green and some yellow. The linen ground might be more aggressively yellow in tone but early in the century a less serviceable ground was introduced and dominated the work from the 1780s onwards, a poor, moth-attracting woollen canvas known as tammy cloth. Some of the best 18th-century samplers are worked on a glazed gauze known as tiffany associated especially with the 1720s to the 1740s.

Decorative borders appeared as formal edgings to small pictorial panels upon samplers from about 1710; later they appeared round the entire sampler which was then often nearly square in shape. Probably the teachers rather than the children are to blame for the fact that these increasingly important borders compare so badly with the lines of repetitive pattern across the 17th century band sampler. More often than not the later border is composed of straggly formalised flowers—roses, strawberries, honeysuckle or other flowers on a wavy or zig-zag stalk inexactly spaced and coming to pieces at the corners. Devices, no longer in bands, were dispersed over the piece and there was an altogether new consideration for formal layout.

Some lively pictorial work is included in 18th-century specimens, however, comparable with the needlework pictures detailed in Chapter 6. Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, sometimes in contemporary dress, were popular, and landscapes, houses, pot plants in the Dutch manner, birds and animals also, along with such details as dovecotes and windmills. This tendency increased during the 18th century with some quite elaborate records of Georgian architecture in contrast to the utterly plain collections of lettering on other samplers of the period which include the



D. Detail from a late 17th-century bed curtain, part of a set of wide and narrow curtains, each over 7 feet long, worked in wool on cotton and linen twill in long-and-short, satin and stem stitches with laid and couched work and French knots. Petals and leaves are worked solid as are the hillocky foregrounds with their individual motifs of flowers, and stags pursued by spotted hounds.

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Ten Commandments, Psalms, and hymns reflecting the great religious revival. Watts, Wesley and Doddridge issued collections of hymns in 1720, 1730 and 1738 that sometimes appear on these.

In all probability many of the children delighted in the more lugubrious verses and were in fact "improved" by their grounding in moral values and even the most excruciating verse might be enlivened with gay pictorial fragments—the flowers that the sampler embroiderer noted "go swiftly to decay" and the crowns of glory that are among favourite motifs. Whether on a teacher's insistence or from an inherent dislike of black spaces the sampler worker often filled a short line of alphabet or other small corner with crowns and coronets, sometimes a row from a sovereign's down to a baron's. On other samplers such spaces are filled with the initials of relatives, paternal side first, and then the crowns—less frequently crosses—appear over the initials of those deceased. Sometimes one notes a triangle of letters as on old pewterware, indicating a marriage, the surname initial at the top and husband and wife Christian name initials to left and right below. Throughout the 18th century more often than not the worker signed her own name in full with the date; after the mid-century she often gave her age as well, with unattractive emphasis upon precocity.

Stitches popular on 18th-century samplers included especially cross stitch, satin, stem and running stitches. Cross stitch and eyelet holes were most often used for lettering and there was considerable use of tent stitch, chain stitch and herringboning among other perennial favourites. Some samplers late in the century were quite small. At their worst this century's samplers were not even copybooks, for the formal balance of a design might necessitate the sudden ending of an alphabet several letters short.

One exceptional type of sampler that appeared in the late 18th century deserves attention. This was worked mainly in darning. Results vary from extremely simple "needle weaving"—squares, crosses, Vs and diamond shapes of coloured wools worked in neat rows across the linen—to flower groups shaded in darning and outlined in chain

stitch. The best—and these are really attractive—were worked on tiffany and date between about 1780 and 1810. Square holes might be cut in the tiffany and these filled with fine darning stitches in silk, either plainly or in a wide range of the damask patterns that might be required for mending linen napery. In less thorough work—and less usefully instructive—the ground was not cut away. In the most desirable specimens the flowers in darning stitch act as an ornamental centrepiece to such practical needle skill. The work is associated particularly with the Eastern counties of England and is thought to have come from the Low Countries.

Darned samplers continued into the 19th century but they are quite out of the ordinary run—and the run was never more ordinary than in the early 19th century. Children continued to work long, dull verses surrounded by detached conventionalised motifs such as flower-vases, trees, birds and animals often dominated by quite elaborate and painstakingly exact representations of houses, very formal and trim, sometimes with gardens and figures. The whole design was most emphatically symmetrical yet seldom escaped a sense of bittiness and clutter and this perhaps was all the child learned from it and put into effect when she furnished her home. Occasionally the building is a formidable “Solomon’s temple”. The stitch was dominated by the ubiquitous cross stitch but tent stitch was in considerable use. The material was still frequently a woollen tammy cloth and the stitchery, too, might now be in coloured wools or cottons instead of silks. Some were on coarse linen. Mercerised cotton might be used in Victorian samplers. In that age of revivals there was some revival of the old style of sampler with rows of motifs, especially between about 1830 and 1850, with wavy lines between the rows of letters and numerals and detached motifs.

Before the mid-19th century many samplers carried specimen motifs for Berlin wool work—not specimen stitches since cross stitch was all-dominant. These included more extravagant motifs such as heraldic animals and fabulous castles reflecting the period’s delight in romantic escapism, followed by more small geometrical motifs. Some offer

interesting glimpses of needlewomen exploring the less obvious possibilities of cross stitch modifications. They were the work of children seldom even into their teens and they mostly have the air of being executed specifically to adult requirements. Because these more recent specimens have survived in greater numbers and because this type has largely appealed to the faker, there is a tendency perhaps for the public to regard these as "typical". In reality they mark a last degenerate phase in the sampler's history.

Even by the mid-century some schools were turning back to the older conception of the piece as a collection of what might be termed working stitches for the home embroiderer. A book, *The Sampler*, 1850, refers to children practising and then accurately working a range of stitches on their samplers: "back, chain, darning, besting, herringbone, marking overcast, button-hole and Oeillet-hole stitch". In his survey of Welsh samplers F. G. Payne mentions a report of 1847 regarding Welsh education in which samplers receive considerable praise. But only extremely rarely does one find a specimen of any special interest, possibly commemorating some contemporary event. What remains most remarkable perhaps is the sheer industry involved, as in a Cardiff specimen of 1780 worked with no fewer than 250 words detailing "The Life of the Happy Man" and bearing a note on the back: "Mary Dudden were 12 Years of age when this Sampler were worked, and some part of it by moonlight."

Any sampler must be acquired with caution. Details to watch for include alterations of a date; the hiding of holes under newly applied couched or laid silks, or even the grafting in of pieces from other samplers; and the transfer of the whole sampler on to suitably "aged" new material.

Chapter Thirteen

RAISED OR STUMP WORK

NO other form of English embroidery has provoked such derision among later needlewomen or such cupidity among collectors as the raised or embossed work that became known to Victorians as stump work. No other form has so notably combined sophistication with childishness, superb needlecraft and beautiful colouring with the most lighthearted puppetry and naïve story-telling. Stump work, indeed, or such specimens as have been thought worthy of preservation for 300 years, is a matter of extremes, as might be expected of the girls who created it, daughters of wealth and prosperity, growing up in the flamboyant great houses of Stuart England.

In childhood, under close supervision, these girls would have demonstrated their skill at a wide range of stitches in severely formal band samplers, coloured and white (see Chapter 12). The stump work expressed their freedom to apply those stitches for their own delight in pictorial, story-telling, fashion-loving informality. This work was then mounted on the tops and sides of small caskets and toilet cabinets, on mirror frames and books. It was shaped into sachets like the "two large sweet bags" valued at £15 in the 1614 inventory of the Earl of Northampton, "embrodered with embossed worke of silver, gold and coulored silkes, and filled upp with ovals of divers personages, lined both with clowded sattenes blacke the ground white". (These were considerably earlier than the majority of this work.) Some were worked as pictures and today these are supplemented by unfinished cabinet sets framed as wall decoration.

Raised work at first consisted predominantly of metal

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and seed pearls, and the original intention, presumably, was that it would take the rub of wear. But the embroiderer's delight in decorative effects overrode practical considerations. Book covers in raised work soon had to be carried in protective bags, and the cabinet embroideries were preserved under sheets of mica or in outer cases such as a velvet example for the "little cabinett of needleworke" noted in the Northampton inventory. As a result, it is possible today to see some stump work in almost its original radiance. Faded, tattered specimens are correspondingly dowdy and of interest only to the student.

Superficially these specimens are remarkably alike, from the splendid mansion on the skyline below the sun in splendour, to the Italianate fountain and pool in the foreground, then such a feature of the English formal garden, and from the principal, more or less regal figures to the "king's beasts and badges" that flank them. The scene usually has a landscape setting with detached motifs to fill up the intervening spaces around the story-telling figures, and even these roses, carnations, pansies, fruit trees, caterpillars, snails, are of quite equally limited range. A hare and hound, a kingfisher and a parrot or bullfinch appear to have been considered almost indispensable.

The basis is usually rich white satin in a narrow width, worked in slightly twisted silks with the flat embroidery mainly in long-and-short, satin and split stitches. But in many early specimens all the main figures appear in high relief, "on the stamp" as Lady Marian Alford described it in 1886 in one of the earliest attempted derivations of the term stump work. In some, little wooden shapes or stumps have been used for faces and hands. The royal figures may stand within tents or canopies with loosely hanging embroidered curtains as some protection for their wonderful clothing of the most exquisite embroidery and lace, often studded with paste and pearls.

Very often they are the principals in some Old Testament or Apocryphal story, such as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba under canopies bearing the Stuart arms, or Isaac and Rebecca, or Jephthah's daughter. Occasionally Orpheus is found charming the beasts, or Daphne being turned into a

laurel, or Venus and Cupid mourning Adonis, while the four Continents, or the Elements, or the Senses, may be represented around a mirror or on the canted corners of a casket. Sometimes the figures defy identification—a lady playing a lute, a swashbuckling cavalier, anonymous as the printed fashion plate. But whatever the theme, clothes and background details are as highly fashionable in the contemporary Stuart manner as were, doubtless, their creators.

In theory the result might well be as gauche and ugly as its solemn Victorian detractors thought it. But fortunately for posterity these girls' delight in their rich, sparkling little world was recorded in a quality and variety of stitchery that ensured its preservation until it came to be appreciated for its light on its brief era of popularity, contained well within the 17th century.

The origins of stump work are not hard to find. Much fine ecclesiastical embroidery in high relief had been produced in Spain, Italy and Germany, and the tradition was maintained in, for example, the cope in red silk with winged angel heads in high relief that Charles I gave to the Chapter of Durham. Some Italian relief work strikingly resembled the delicate effects of gilded gesso and it may be noted that early English specimens of stump work tend to be almost wholly in relief and very considerably enriched with metal threads and spangles. But the girls who took such an obvious delight in stump work would need a more immediate stimulus and this, surely, was to be found in the English professional embroidery of their day. They would observe relief work, more expert but very little less naïve, on pompous bed trimmings and on heraldic tabard and banner.

One has only to examine such a small but perfect specimen as the Earl of Bradford's bag of the Great Seal (Fig. 10), possessed by his ancestor Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Bart., when he was Lord Keeper 1667–72. Here every inch is so closely packed with detail that it suggests embossed and chased metal or wire filigree, but the lion and unicorn flanking the royal coat of arms are as "human" as any on the typical stump work background and the four "boys" and eight winged cherub heads among the flowers are as laboured, or as amusing, as any child's rendering of Solomon or the Queen of Sheba.

There were other immediate reasons, too, of course, for the work's 17th-century development in England. Technically the rich parchment effect of the high quality satin then becoming available invited pictorial designs in which the background could be left uncovered, and this in itself prompted a break from the home embroiderer's monotonous tent stitch. Laid backgrounds suggest Continental work. As to the style of the design, tapestries were an obvious main source of embroidery design in the rich houses, records of their titles suggesting that Esther and Ahasuerus, Susannah and the Elders, David and Bathsheba and the like were already traditional favourites.

Tent stitch was the embroiderer's obvious method of achieving the effect of tapestry but the results were therefore all the more boringly familiar to the girls who grew up among such luxuries. The pictures were lifeless, flatter in effect even than paintings, the stitch wearisome, the background filling an exercise gladly abandoned. To such girls the development of three-dimensional effects must have seemed entirely admirable, providing more perfectly for the display of fashions and the parade of stitchcraft prowess.

The main themes of such work did not greatly matter. There was a natural tendency for the central figures to represent royalty and therefore inevitably to be somewhat suggestive of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, or Charles II and Catherine of Braganza, but it is probably foolish to relate this to any particularly fervent royalist sentiments. Similarly, the lion, stag, leopard and unicorn or camel that appear so monotonously and with such consistent lifelessness to the sides of the main picture are to be accepted as part and parcel of their period, rather than indicative of any erudition regarding the old badges and emblems.

Typical too of the period's mood is the crowded setting, expressing a lively dislike of blank spaces. Here again the home embroiderer is following the professional example and in both instances with the same basic purpose of fortifying the fabric against the fret of hard wear. Thus the area surrounding the main theme is filled with a decorative medley. But even among the background motifs it may be noted that the same sun among puffy clouds, the same moon and

rainbow, the same cherry-eating parrot or bullfinch and the rest appear in various combinations time and time again. It is only in an occasional detail that the embroiderer has apparently looked beyond the available patterns, as when heavy smoke from a wealth of chimneys in the great house in the background may have been prompted by a real homestead's change from log to seacoal fires. Even such a flash of movement in the stiff little scene as a dog chasing a swan is probably a flat copy, and certainly a remarkable number of the formal garden fountains and pools harbour extremely similar, if surprising, mermaids.

Pattern sources are discussed in Chapter 19. It has been suggested that in many cases the satin was supplied ready printed: partially worked specimens have been found in which outlined figures are identified in printing so small that obviously it was intended only as preliminary information to be covered over by the embroiderer. The same style of narrow, green-selvedged white satin appears time and time again, but the many minor points of variance even in largely similar embroideries suggest that printed patterns were assembled and applied at home to the material. Widely dissimilar borders of flowers or formal wreathing may frame almost identical central scenes.

The very fact that the minor fillings—flowers, animals, “wormes and flies” scattered in unrelated profusion in the established manner—tend to be all of much the same overall measurements rather than proportionate to each other suggests copying from a limited range of separate, highly popular patterns. Comparing this work with contemporaneous pattern books one often has the impression that the embroiderer has merely copied a pageful of unassociated motifs without troubling to pick and choose. One notices again and again that different pieces of embroidery may contain motifs that are virtually identical in the outlines that might be pricked or traced from a paper pattern, yet are so differently treated by the individual embroiderer that where one child shows, say, a castle, another shows a group of cottages. It is intriguing to observe, for example, the various uses found for the somewhat ungainly fountain, immediately recognisable even when worked without its cupid finial.

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On a looking-glass frame it is a customary detail at the centre of the bottom panel; on a casket it may dominate a scene of David and Bathsheba or Diana and Actaeon.

Some indication of date may be gleaned from the arrangement of such details which tend as the century progresses to become perhaps a little more carefully considered in relation to the main story theme. Specimens bearing dates most often relate to the period 1640-60. Costumes are the main guide to the dating of the rest, and it has been pointed out that they must be the costumes of the younger figures, since an older man, especially, tended to retain the fashions of his own youth and would be thus depicted by the fashion-conscious recorders.

The actual technical accomplishment of the work—to many a collector and to any needlewoman the most interesting feature—depended largely on the individual. But it is possible to trace early experiments in the 16th century. Elizabethan embroideries are frequently enriched by heavy plaited or buttonhole stems to the flower coils, and by heavy silken balls as flower centres. And one finds petals worked separately on tiny wire frames in needlepoint lace and attached only at the flower centre. Human figures naturally proved particularly tempting and some early raised effects resulted from pressing tent stitch figures from the back of the work and filling the resultant small cavities with paste. The main transition was made when the objective changed from decorative emphasis to three-dimensional realism, and from line work to solid surface embroidery.

In stump work the raised figures were worked separately and attached to the satin background so that there should be no disturbance of its surface, cord or gimp being couched over the line of the join. They were worked on linen rounded over pads of wool, tow, horsehair or fabric scraps, finally made neat with paper pasted on the back. When moulds of boxwood were carved for faces and hands they might be covered with a close network of buttonhole stitch or with embroidered or painted silk that has sometimes perished. The finest faces are in exquisitely smooth split stitch, the features outlined in stem stitch. Some faces are made in wax, like those of dolls and, like dolls of the period,

these figures tend to have long bone or wooden hands that look grotesque and spoil the effect of the needlework. Some have wire fingers, silk-covered. In many specimens even the background birds are padded, even the acorns on the oak twig are wooden balls encased in net of close button-holing in a manner employed for much later bead-work (see Chapter 15).

Knot stitch might be used for the hair and also for sheep's fleeces, mossy banks and some clouds if these were not expressed in the coils of silk-covered wire known as purl (see Chapter 4). Knots or loops of purl or thin cord could make charming ringlets. When real hair was used—stiff and glossy—it has lasted badly. But it was in depicting the clothes that the girls lavished their most enthusiastic needlework, much in close needlepoint lace stitches, worked separately and only partly attached, within outlines of thin flexible wire. Some gowns are of satin prinked with tiny bright flowers. Even fur effects were created with darned silk pile resembling chenille. Indeed, probably every stitch of the period may be found on a single stump work picture, including the old favourite tent stitch and the chain stitch favoured in the 18th century. Some such as split stitch had been neglected for centuries since the high days of *opus Anglicanum*.

The soft floss silks used show to perfection against the rich satin. Colours typically include a range of closely related shades achieving really beautiful effects, entirely avoiding either the insipidity or the garishness of much later work. The coppery reds and smoky blues escape the damaging tones of magenta, the ochre yellows and tawny golds and browns have a rich buttercup foundation, and the greens, too, are free of the later ugly chrome yellow.

In addition, and less fortunately, there was a tendency to include somewhat tinselly ornaments such as might be expected of little girls often barely in their teens and still at heart dressing their dolls. These have often suffered far more than the stitches in the course of centuries. For example, minor ornaments such as caterpillars once radiant in the plumules of peacock tail feathers may be scarcely discernible. Even the popular purl has often tarnished,

giving sombre heaviness to the clouds around the smiling sun with its rays of long-and-short stitch in thin wire. The little twisted springs of purl are among the most familiar and versatile additions to any 16th- or 17th-century embroidery subject to the rub of wear. Spangles had a similar purpose. Silver-gilt and silver thread and wire are introduced as couched work on the white satin much as they had appeared earlier on crimson velvet. The principal figures wear massive gilded crowns jewelled with paste and seed pearls.

Pearls and beads and coral appear in profusion in jewellery; bobbin lace may be found on collars and real braids may lace sleeves and shoes. Among other regular details are sheets of talc. These appear as windows and as the fountain pools, but even here elaborate needlework is involved, creating orderly herringbone ripples under the crude talc. Indeed much of the work is so meticulous that it is small wonder Sir Henry Slingsby in 1631 required "6 paire of specktales to give away amongste my daughters", at a period when a Durham mercer could stock 27 pairs at a total value of 4s. 9d.

Of the articles most frequently ornamented with stump work pictures are mentioned in Chapter 6; book covers in Chapter 7, and cushions in Chapter 10. Perhaps the most frequently treasured today is a stump work casket. Many girls advanced from samplers to the more personal work of making panels of embroidery which could be mounted on small caskets, averaging perhaps 14 inches wide, 11 inches deep and 10 or 15 inches high, the needlework entirely covering the wooden framework. These caskets may have canted sides to the lids and canted corners but otherwise vary little in size or shape. The lid opens to reveal compartments for toilet bottles around a central well which the girl might line with looking glass and carpet with a hand-coloured print. An occasional example has been found with a garden or pastoral scene under the lid created in full relief. Doors or a drop-front give access to shallow drawers fronted with less elaborate embroidery in formal patterns, often in rapid, long stitches that would be no use for more exposed areas. Often, too, there is a hidden compartment, surely never really "secret".

A casket may be attractively finished with silver handles, escutcheons and ball feet, but often the basic construction is extremely flimsy. It must be appreciated that stump work was only one of several coverings for such caskets and in any case there was a tendency to reduce the proportion of raised detail during Charles II's reign. Many caskets were wholly in flat tent stitch, some in bead work (Chapter 15) and when the craze for such needlework was past the ingenious could imitate gold filigree with rolled paper work or the finest veneers with split straws.

Lace and glove boxes were treated in a similar way but required fewer panels for the larger, flatter box shape. Some may have been intended to protect muffs from moth. Wenceslaus Hollar's pupil Gaywood illustrated a fur muff in a carved wooden box. Furs might be protected in boxes lined with pounded sandal and citron woods beneath the sarcenet, perhaps also with fabric soaked in sweet orange flower water. In some instances a lace box lid has a central oval panel in the pictorial manner framed in *passementerie* or masses of purl and surrounded by the usual medley of motifs. This way of breaking up a large area appears too on the looking-glass frames that were such a feature of this work.

These looking-glasses were treasured possessions and in giving them wide frames the girls were but imitating the cushion frames of the cabinet maker's *marquetry* or the lobed frames of the pseudo-Oriental *japanners*. The embroidery was mounted on the oak frame with edges of silk braid, painted japan or rich tortoiseshell or horn backed with red or gold paper. Some of the most attractive have embroidered doors close over the glass, each perhaps with a single figure in a landscape, while the usual animals fill the corners. A delightful specimen in Lady Richmond's collection has an Englishman with a squirrel and a black savage with a parrot. The corner animals are exceptionally lively, including a horse and leopard (Fig. 35).

When only the surround is embroidered there is usually a figure at each side; Charles I had one embroidered with "the 3 faculties and the 7 Liberall sciences", but a more usual choice is a king and queen in handsome canopies, inevitably

RAISED OR STUMP WORK

tending to resemble Charles II and Catherine of Braganza, or a cavalier and lady. The great house or castle may be at the top, or a medallion containing a scene or even a portrait bust framed in purl or wire gimp, while the bottom panel contains the inevitable pool with its fountain, rocks, fish and mermaid.

Collectors sometimes express surprise at the sudden disappearance of raised work in the late 17th century but this surely was to be expected of a hobby pursued by young ladies susceptible to every whisper of fashion and rich enough to pass quickly from one pleasure to another. This work surely was never compared with the enduring household embroideries created by less frivolous older sisters. But in any case the whole mood of the work was imitative, reflecting a period of gesso console tables, silver cabinets and carved walnut chairs all ornamented in high relief with armorial motifs, flowers, crowns and "boys". Before the end of the century these too were *pussé* and the craze was for smooth surfaces, flatly enriched with flowering scrolls of marquetry or Oriental fantasies of japanning. Glittering embossed embroidery was dead but the cool green forests of crewel work curtains grew apace.

Chapter Fourteen

PINCUSHIONS

PINCUSHIONS are to be found today dating back through at least three centuries, and fascinating indeed are the minor sidelights they offer on more pretentious fashions in a variety of crafts. Now that the rules of dress no longer turn women themselves into animated pincushions these engaging trifles are becoming of interest to more and more collectors. Fortunately, however, innumerable specimens have yet to make the price-inflating journey from junk shop tray to antique dealer's cabinet and can still be regarded as an inexpensive indulgence.

Pins have an age-long history and even by 1400 superior pins *de la façon d'Angleterre* were being sold in Paris. Pin-poppets, pin-cods, pin-pillows are recorded from the days when horned headdresses and wimples required as much anxious fixing as Victorian skirts. Some of the earliest on record are silver pin-cases protecting the pins from damp when they were of handwrought iron, mis-shapen at best, hand-hammered and filed, and woefully quick to rust into uselessness. The theft of a pin-box was still considered worth advertising in the press in the 18th century, and small two-inch or three-inch wooden pin-poppets for the pocket were popular in the 19th century. But even by early Elizabethan days small pins might be valued at less than 6d. a thousand and large ones at half-a-crown.

The inventory of a Kirby tradesman in 1578 included 16,000 for 12s. 6d., four papers of round-headed pins for 13d., and also four pin-cods and two needle cases, 2s. John Johnson of Darlington stocked 10,500 pins in 1592 at a total value of only 7s. 6d. Mary Tudor, Princess of Wales, as a girl of fifteen in 1531, could list 10,000 pins in her wardrobe

account, with 1 lb. of thread and 200 needles. When pins, though still costly, became common enough to be stuck into fabric cods or cushions instead of requiring covered boxes, these pin-pillows became the perfect small gifts, not perhaps for their intrinsic charm but because, in the manner of their period, they transformed a straightforward gift of known value—the pins stuck upon its underside, and later decoratively upon its top—into a gracious gesture: it became, as it were, the substitute for the embroidered purse offering substitute gold. Elizabeth herself did not disdain to accept among her 1561–62 new year gifts “a cushion cloth with black silk and fringed with gold and purpel silk, with pinpillow embrodred”.

More pincushions remain from the 17th century, reflecting most of the main embroidery trends of the day. Rectangular examples may be 8, 10 or even 12 inches long with heavily tasselled corners. The spangled bedroom at Knole has a magnificent specimen bearing the coroneted monogram of Charles, 6th Earl of Dorset. Many are worked on linen in fine tent stitch in silk with gay floral sprigs and the lively, recognisable birds and insect creatures associated with the period. Squirrels are conspicuous, the pins regarded as treasure worthy of safe hoarding in the cushion. It has been suggested that the magnificent embroideries listed as sweet bags in the Northampton inventory, 1614, may have been pincushions such as were heavily drenched with scent for use on the toilet table.

More formal patterns may be in couched metal thread; some are merely spangled and monogrammed. Others are bright with conventionalised flowers or love-knots in beads, or diapered with flower slips in the later 17th-century rococo stitch. Heavy braid or silk and metal galon covers the seams. Pictorial work is rare but the other extreme of formal geometrical design is to be noted, including flame stitch, reminding one that little boys have not always escaped the discipline of needlework. Pincushions often suggest children's work but some from this period may have been cut imperfectly from larger embroideries as Congreve indicated in his *Way of the World*: “Thou . . . dost deal in Remnants of Remnants like a maker of Pincushions.”

A small pincushion may be found in a 17th-century workbox, and some delightful specimens are attached to the period's embroidered purses, reproducing simplified versions of the purse ornament. Squares and heart shapes, representations of bellows, bunches of grapes and other small fantasies belong to this period as well as to the 19th century (Fig. 46).

By the middle of the 18th century even pincushions were involved in political propaganda, being stitched, woven or printed with Jacobite slogans, transformed into "a variegated tool of faction and sedition". But very many more exquisite samples are charming reminders of the long-lived and delightful custom of marking a birthday, wedding or christening by the gift of a pincushion stuck with pins that spelt out some such appropriate greeting as "Welcome little stranger". This fashion began at least as early as the mid-17th century and continued until the mid-19th. Some show quite elaborate flower outlines and such quotations as Byron's

Hail to this teeming stage of strife
Hail lovely miniature of life

Wedding pincushions are stuck with good wishes on one side and the recipients' initials on the other. Dummy pins known as manikins were made specially for the purpose, black japanned for black-edged mourning cushions. Even "fringes" were devised with pins projecting around the edges of the cushion. Pins with solid heads that would not fall off were first made in England with moulds in 1797; from 1840 a speedier method was in use. By the time the heart-shaped pincushions had become popular among the lucky gifts for superstitious sailors the good wishes were often boldly expressed in beads held down by pins. Such cushions often bear dates, and this is also a point to look for among the knitted pincushion balls of the late 18th and 19th centuries (Fig. 36).

A pincushion, like a pair of pockets, might hang from the waist under the gown. Occasionally a picture shows one worn where it can be seen, as in Morland's "Domestic Happiness" where the daughter, sewing, has a barrel-shaped cushion hanging from a ribbon. *The Lady's Magazine*,

1793, refers to "a heart, an oval or an oblong square tied to the apron string". Early silver-encircled balls were supplemented in the 18th and 19th centuries by knitted balls. Here one looks for dates as well as initials or such ever-popular souvenir words as "A Present from Ramsgate"—or wherever the resort may be—worked in a different coloured silk in the knitting stitches. Mrs. Head's collection includes dates from 1782 to 1840, all made in the same way with two circular sections stitched together over the ball of bran and finished with flat silk cord to mask the join.

These are the more interesting since they probably suggested the other most popular style of small pincushion associated especially with the early years of the 19th century when the clinging dresses of fashion made the fat little balls taboo and pins had to be carried in purse or reticule. This is still round, still composed of two circular sections stitched together but the sections are flat, sewn closely over discs of card, and the pins stuck round the rim. These are among the most delightful pincushions, often only 2 to 3 inches across, of satin perhaps, or watered silk, daintily embroidered, most usually with flowers.

Sometimes a double pincushion in this style has needles too on a flannel in the centre. Sometimes the flower ornament consists of beads, on floss silk stems, sometimes it is delicately shaped in fragments of colourful ribbons. There may be a monogram or initials or a sentiment such as *Dieu me voit*. The most obvious comparison is with the "watch paper" sometimes found inside the outer case of an old hunter watch, often printed, even as satin pincushions sometimes were, but occasionally embroidered with silks or hair on the same minute scale, daintily edged and flowered or monogrammed.

The same style of flat-edged pin "cushion" was developed in many ways remote from embroidery—most exquisitely with mother-of-pearl and disarmingly in Tunbridge ware and scrimshaw work, in the outlines of watches, swans, wheelbarrows, coaches. But none is more perfectly in keeping with its period than the small, flat cornucopia. One is illustrated for example in *Pins and Pincushions* by Longman

and Loch. Embroidered leaves and stems at the top of the silk horn form unobtrusive background to a wealth of grapes and other fruits and flowers represented in brilliant beads.

More pinballs remain from early Victorian days when every style of craftsman was alive to the market for pincushions as dresses lost their airy classic folds in favour of more and ever more elaboration,

Making a woman like a porcupine,
Not rashly to be touched.

The Domestic Journal, for example, in 1836 suggested a harlequin ball composed of five-sided patches of velvet, silk and satin "in as many bright and varied colours as possible", the joins masked by manikin pins. Twelve of these patches would make a circle, or six could be arranged petal-wise around a hexagonal centre.

The sewing room of this period had its own styles of pincushion, some to clamp to the table, some weighted with sand or lead to help the seamstress, some filled with emery powder for cleaning rusty needles, some involved with winders, tape measures and other tools mentioned in Chapter 20. The Victorian kitchen had its braid-trimmed cushion hanging near the fire where the steamy atmosphere would be counteracted by the intense heat of the huge black grate. This was often a bright red heart or diamond. But the most splendid belong to the Victorian dressing table. With the charity bazaar becoming well-established the early Victorian pincushion acquired a charm all its own just because it became such an incalculable little demonstration of amateur imagination.

As the queen's reign progressed the pincushion, like the dresses it was designed to serve, became ever more solid, pompous and obvious in its purpose. Its only resemblance then was to the equally overstuffed, largely comfortable furniture of the period. Or it may be argued that this furniture, especially in bedroom and boudoir, was but a nightmare of magnified pincushions. The furniture has mostly gone: pincushions remain, large, complacent, gorgeously overdressed in layer upon looped-up layer of fabric

and beads, lace and fringes, the top often buttoned in the upholsterer's manner or smothered in embroidery or beadwork.

The desire to describe endless examples would be almost irresistible were it not for the fact that the young ladies' books and journals were for ever inciting to even more ambitious endeavours. One obvious favourite that may yet be found in actuality suggests no mere stool or sofa of a pincushion but rather one of the period's most ambitious styles of drawing room centre piece—a circular ottoman with its heavily upholstered seat surrounding a towering flower group or piece of parian statuary. Typical instructions for this pincushion require a bran-stuffed cushion with a central hollow, covered with silk, over which a loose cover is tied on—two being made to allow for washing—"not forgetting the hanging frill of lace". In the centre is placed what *Treasures of Needlework* describes as "a handsome toilet bottle"; *The Girl's Own Book* favours a glass of bright and fragrant flowers.

Probably the most desirable style of 19th-century pincushion, however, is the doll, her billowing skirts forming a massive pincushion which, as likely as not, the conventional Victorian has ornamented with the pincushion's customary frill of lace. Such a doll is at her most charming when gaily decked with beads, augmented perhaps by one or two of the period's monumental hatpins (Fig. 37).

Chapter Fifteen

BEADWORK

STRANGE indeed are some of the relics of past modes put on record in London's Victoria and Albert Museum—and how surprised their makers would be to learn of such immortality. For example, there is that watch guard pretentiously worked twice over with the Garter motto *Honi soit qui mal y pense* interspersed with the national emblems, the whole being executed not in precious metals or jewellery but in the naïve child medium of coloured beads.

This naïve quality of old beadwork endears it to many a collector of minor needlecraft trifles. At its best, of course, it is extremely valuable, skilled work, some of it more than 300 years old and yet as vividly coloured and clearly outlined as when it was new. Yet one feels it can never be regarded with the seriousness of more adult, scholarly antiques. For that very reason it has a particular appeal in these unpretentious days. Nineteenth-century beadwork necklets and wrist bands, miser purses and little bags, picked up at such prices as 10s. for a miser purse or 25s. for a bag, may form the basis of a collection wholly in the tradition of beadwork caskets, pictures and modelled ornaments fashioned with equal amateur ardour in the 17th century and now valued at many pounds.

The delicacy of the work, with tiny beads arranged in richly blended colour schemes and above all the general state of its preservation, makes a piece worth collecting. Some later 19th-century specimens are carelessly made of large, crude beads, entirely lacking the appeal of earlier work.

Like all really satisfying forms of ornament bead embroidery was fundamentally purposeful. Not only the

colours have proved enduring: if not too weighty for their background the beads themselves, closely sewn over the fabric or knitted into its substance, have strengthened the cloth or leather of many an old bag, have taken the rub of wear on book cover and casket and have given an impressive weight and dignity to dress and household hangings. Even by the 13th century Venice was supplying the world with enormous quantities of sparkling, colourful glass beads, and by Elizabethan days many women possessed necklaces or "paires" of beads and Holinshed was referring, in 1577, to such apparel as "a cloake of broched satin . . . beaded from the shoulder to the waist".

By the 17th century the English glassmen were beginning to manufacture beads themselves: there is considerable evidence contradicting the widespread belief that English manufacture began as late as Georgian days. A subscription was opened in London as early as 1621 for funds to make beads, not for home sale but for the Indians in Virginia, and by 1697 John Houghton was able to report "in beads I am told we outdo our neighbours and are likely in a short time to serve other countries". In 1694 no fewer than 20,855 lbs. of bugles—tubular beads for dress decoration that now tend to be associated with the early 20th century—were imported into England, coming from Murano, Holland, Germany and America. More than 643 gross of bead necklaces are also recorded among the year's imports, but, conspicuously, no separate consignments of beads, indication of adequate home supplies.

The middle and later years of the 17th century constituted one of the great periods for bead embroidery. Indeed the collector may usefully learn its techniques and standards from authenticated museum specimens before starting in quest of a collection. Beads are to be noted threaded on silk and sewn on to leather for bags and gloves. Small details may be worked by sewing down single beads; when strings of beads are couched on to the ground fabric this may be padded in parts for greater effect. Some embroideries are entirely covered with beads or bugles sewn upon linen, even sets of wall hangings such as the famous example possessed by the Earl of Lytton at Knebworth: here the flowering

tree pattern is worked in small round beads against a background of spirals or whorls composed of innumerable silvery bugles each only $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch long. Pictorial panels may have bead backgrounds following the outlines of the figures, giving the work a lively, mosaic quality. This was the style indicated in a late 17th-century reference to "Adam and Eve in bugle work on canvas".

One is reminded of the embroidered panels, caskets, mirror frames and the like worked on white satin in vivid pictorial scenes and figures associated with the 1640s-80s, much of it raised (see Chapter 13). Here beads provide the desired solidity and the background in milky opaque beads suggests the parchment-coloured satin. Shades of green, blue, purple and yellow give this work an effect of considerable richness. Sometimes the foreground pool—set in talc by the stump work embroiderer—is here presented in clear beads with blue beads for ripples. Even where the pattern on a bag or book cover is a conventional repetitive design the beads composing each small single-colour motif are often decoratively arranged. This particularly ornamental quality was something the 19th century tended to forget. A beadwork casket may be noted with the figure scenes and other details resembling caskets in stump work, bright and attractive with satisfying blues and greens, but the bead colours are muddy and the beads mis-shapen by the exquisite standards of the next century.

Perhaps the most intriguing applications of beadwork in the 17th century are the frivolous little gardens very occasionally found inside the caskets and the more usual baskets, hair ornaments, sprays and vases of flowers, even mirror frames and candlesticks, built up in full relief. The tiny beads are threaded on stiff wires and these built up into petals, leaves and so on, supported on twisted ropes of thicker bead-covered wire. Roses, forget-me-nots, blackberries, well-padded peas and acorns, catkins, veined leaves may be presented with considerable realism; such posies and baskets returned in Victorian days. A basket with a linen canvas ground couched with strings of beads at the Victoria and Albert Museum is signed and dated *Sarah Gurnall August 24 Anno 1659*. Beadwork in Lady Richmond's

collection included a four-wheeled chariot in translucent white and coloured glass beads over a modelled framework of wire, rare and early in the 17th-century manner.

A basket or open tray in this style has such relief work forming sloping sides to surround a central flat panel of wood faced with satin or linen. The panel itself usually contains pictorial scenes similar to those on caskets, such as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba expressed in strings of beads flatly sewn down or with some padded details. One notes, too, the familiar corner motifs of lion, unicorn, stag and the like, sometimes extending up the basket's sloping sides. Such baskets were mainly ornamental, but formed particularly dainty receptacles for christening gifts.

The almost incredibly tiny beads of some of the most beautiful bead embroidery belong to the later 18th century. Technical improvements in glass-making resulted in much smaller beads and more brilliant colours from about 1760. For stringing such fine beads the end of the fine silk or flax thread was stiffened with wire, a hair-like thread of wire being twisted into it. But the finest beads would only fit on to special threads pointed with shellac. "Embroidery" with such beads was extremely effective, bright-coloured opaque backgrounds showing off the brilliance of their colours—especially reds, greens and bright and pale blues—in a garland or basket of fantastic flowers, perhaps, on a handsome flat handbag or twinkling on a waistcoat in place of gold and silver stitchery. Purses, needlecases and the like were obvious recipients for such work which even found its way on to outdoor baby clothes. Design was dominated by the period's neo-classic mood, and there must have been many an inexperienced worker who welcomed the straight, simple lines of the popular key pattern border, often found in blue against a cream background.

Lovely jewel colours—opal, ruby, turquoise, amber—were appearing in beads by 1820 and were welcomed by a period seeking always for pictorial effects. The exotic Biblical scenes of the 17th century were rivalled by finely wrought crests and monograms, by extremely naïve hunting scenes, buildings and even landscapes where trees, mountains and streams figure uneasily in the serried rows of beads sewn on to fine canvas.

By the 1830s innumerable small objects were being decorated with bead work, from jewel boxes and workboxes to spectacle cases and scent bottles, from wall tidies and bell pulls to mule tops and buttons. Even knives and forks might have their wooden handles closely encrusted with beads. In some examples one may discern how the beads were strung on fine wire and wound closely around the solid core to be covered, being secured with a network of fine buttonholing. As an alternative the covering might be worked bead by bead without previous stringing. The cover was worked inside out in buttonholing, around the shape required, each stitch taking up a single bead so that when turned right way out only the beads showed.

Inevitably bead samplers were made but these are fairly rare, partly because in so many cases the beads were sewn on to moth-catching tammy cloth. Other bead decoration was achieved by knitting or crochet and was known as purse knitting. Provided the pattern was worked out in full detail beforehand and the beads introduced in the correct order, there was no difficulty in creating any required pattern with knitting pins or crochet hook—even figures in landscapes.

Stocking or miser purses may be found in such work, the beads being of glass, steel or gilt metal against a fabric ground of blue, red or green (see Chapter 18). Steel beads are often found on these purses, perhaps in association with gilt metal so that the user can place gold and silver coins, or silver and copper, in the appropriately tasselled ends. These metal beads make an attractive collector's side line of their own, finely faceted to glitter with every movement in the manner of more expensive cut steel jewellery. When the trade was in difficulties George IV had a hat ornamented with no fewer than 5,000 steel beads.

A miser purse in good condition is an attractive acquisition but in general one looks mainly for the flat beadwork bags, necklaces and waistbands that testify to the period's domination by the squared simplicity of Berlin wool work. Even in beadwork something was lost in the 19th century. There is a world of difference between typical 18th-century and 19th-century specimens—as great and as subtle as, say, between tent stitch and cross stitch.

BEADWORK

In the cross stitch manner some of the most meticulous work was made on bead looms. When the warp threads had been strained over the small loom the beads required for a single row of the pattern were threaded on a weft thread and this was laid across the warp with one bead between each thread. The needle was then brought back through the row of beads but under the warp threads. Each row of beads was secured in this way but the result was limited, of course, to a straight-sided, flat panel, easily recognised because both sides of the work are identical. The meticulous neatness, the small size of the beads and their wealth of lively colours made this loom work particularly popular for such small items as necklets and wrist bands where they may be found fitted with pinchbeck box-type clasps, gem-set with cairngorms, perhaps, or quartz crystals.

Glass beads became considerably cheaper when the high excise duty on glass was abolished in 1845, and their colour range improved: jet beads were introduced in the 1860s and "rainbow" and "moonlight" colour delicacies were popular, but already another phase in the long history of bead adornment was closing. After about 1860 big, coarse beads tended to reduce such work to the status of a nursery exercise. Nevertheless there are some pleasant scraps of Victoriana to be found. There are tea cosies with big white and grey bead flowers over rich red cross stitch wool and heavy mats with bead flowers and fringes. A screen for a table lamp may be found, the brass stand supporting a deeply fringed and tasselled banner shield, about 9 in. x 7 in., with a pattern in opaque white, clear, light and darker grey and silver beads set in coarse red or blue or mauve wool cross stitch. Hand screens were made too, sometimes fringed with big grey bugles. There are all manner of boxes, too, covered with beads sewn thickly upon net, but suffering, like so many Victorian containers, from overall measurements out of all proportion to their actual capacity.

For those with an interest in the manufacturing techniques that produce their treasures bead-making is fascinating. Each glass bead might be a fragment cut by hand from a coloured glass tube drawn out by the glassman till it measured over 100 feet long. Such cutting left the beads as

rough little tubes: these were smoothed and rounded by a firing process but first their holes had to be kept from closing and for this the beads had to be hand-rolled in a mixture of lime and charcoal. The beads together with some sand were then placed in iron barrels which were slowly rotated over a furnace. When cool the now circular beads were sieved from the sand, poured into bags and shaken to remove the stoppings. The beads were finally rotated in sacks of bran, to emerge with the softly lustrous sheen that gives fine old beadwork its wonderfully enduring beauty and reminds one of the smug little verse in a wide range of clear and opaque beads—blues, greens, yellows, amber, red, black, white—on a small cushion at the Victoria and Albert Museum bearing the date 1657: “NATVRS FLOWERS SOON DOE FADE FVL LONG WE LAST CAVSE ART VS MADE.”

Chapter Sixteen

COSTUME EMBROIDERIES

FRAGMENTS of old costume may intrigue a collector of embroideries but prove bewildering too. Old wills and inventories and the records of gifts to royalty describe a wealth of rich dress items often bearing only slight resemblance to what little remains today. Nevertheless collectors with a knowledge of costume history may identify occasional rarities and may enrich their collections with fine specimens of embroidery, domestic or professional, less familiar than the usual cushion cloth or firescreen panel.

Sometimes small details of trimmings have been preserved for their embroidery when garments have been discarded and are immensely increased in interest value if their original purpose is deduced. It may be remembered that less than thirty years ago opinion was divided even as to the way of wearing the triangular forehead cloth sometimes found accompanying and matching an embroidered coif, yet this was a commonplace three hundred years ago.

John Taylor's famous poem "The Prayse of the Needle" appearing in *The Needle's Excellency* by James Boler is interesting as an early 17th-century record of current stitchery:

... And thus without the Needle we may see
We should without our Bibs and Biggins bee;
No shirts or Smockes, our nakedness to hide,
No garments gay to make us magnified!
No Shadowes, Shapparoones, Caules, Bands, Ruffs, Kuffs,
No Kerchiefes, Quoyfes, Chin-clouts, or Marry-Muffes,
No Cross-cloaths, Aprons, Hand-kerchiefes, or Falls . . .

Portraits suggest yet other minor details, such as the hanging sleeves which still served as leading strings for 17th-century toddlers and were often richly embroidered.

Even the partlets that receive frequent Tudor reference are still to be identified with actual embroideries, yet they must have been considerable: Mary I, as a princess, had one set with 108 pearls, and others of velvet with only the linings embroidered. Her gifts to and from friends included also many embroidered sleeves and frontlets. Even shoes and slippers may offer interesting glimpses of a long-enduring pleasure in embroidered toes.

Unfortunately for the collector the great Elizabethan fashion for costume embroidery can scarcely be represented in an average collection, but some acquaintance with passing vogues contributes to one's understanding of later enthusiasms. The dressy outfits developed in the 17th century are too thickly hung with ribbon points, braids and buttons to require much embroidery, and by the 18th century such work had passed largely to the professional who could respond quickly to passing fashions.

The impersonal embroideries on ladies' court dresses and men's coats and waistcoats are somewhat beyond the scope of this survey. Certainly the early 18th century's dresses bore the stamp of professional skill before their Oriental and rococo fantasies gave place to prints and brocades, although late in the century there was some home embroidery on dress, introducing acorns, shells, festoons of silver leaves and similar delicacies. Patterns for home embroiderers were available, but even the magnificent petticoats more often suggest professional skill, whether their ornament is the superb quilting of Queen Anne's day; the festoons of shells, coral, cornflowers and seaweeds recorded by Mrs. Delany on a mid-century petticoat worn by the Duchess of Bedford; or the delicate white work that became a major cottage industry in the 19th century. As for men's coats and waistcoats, their 18th-century ornament is among the richest but least interesting of embroidery with its flowers and leaves largely reduced to conventional sprays in the glossiest, showiest of padded satin stitch and French knots, with chenille, beads, spangles and ribbon work. When Samuel Pepys gave away an old coat to his wife's brother in 1664 he indicated the value placed on even minor ornament: the coat bore gold edging in each seam "that was the lace of

my wife's best petticoat that she had when I married her".

Much was worked in France, rendering the tailor-importer liable to a fine of £100 as well as the chagrin of having the garments seized and burnt. Embroidery continued on expensive, fashionable waistcoats even into the second half of the 19th century. Dr. C. Willet Cunnington, in his surveys of 18th- and 19th-century costume, gives detailed guidance on the changes of style and cut that help to date such enduring garments as waistcoat and shirt: it may be mentioned here that the waistcoat as we now know it, sleeveless, was rare before 1760.

Nevertheless one finds a certain amount of less ambitious dress embroidery that might perhaps be included in a domestic survey. Some have been mentioned in earlier chapters. From the late 17th and early 18th centuries there are such details as stomachers and aprons. Later in the 18th century, during the general decline in home embroidery, beautiful white work was accomplished, especially in baby wear before it became widely commercialised. Babies' caps may be mentioned, and women's night caps tying under the chin. In the 19th century commercial embroidery trailed flower motifs over the front and border of pelisse and jacket and on innumerable shawls attempted to rival the woven beauty of Kashmir, but even then a certain amount of amateur enthusiasm was devoted to embroidered clothing.

Men's caps and women's coifs are among the more obvious costume details to delight the student of late Tudor and early Stuart embroidery. Specimens of both share the same range of ornament, from the early formal arabesques to the flower slips in lozenge outlines and the stiff flowers in high relief of Stuart days. Especially they show the embroiderer's delight in coiling stem designs, the stems in thick braid stitches bearing familiar English flower heads in chain stitch, couching, speckling and the like, worked with bright floss silks. Among these the most intriguing include a scattering of birds among the stems and the "grotesques" such as dragons, snakes, cockatrices and so on that in English work never seem to become entirely part of the basic pattern. But in general the style varies little, and some hundreds remain.

The ground is usually linen, sometimes silk, the embroidery in coloured silks and substantial details in metal threads, the seams perhaps emphasised with metal stitchery, the ornament dotted with golden spangles and the edges trimmed with narrow metal thread lace. Some Elizabethan specimens are worked wholly in black or red or blue, as listed in the wardrobe of Winifred Barrington of Hatfield, Essex, in 1589: one cambric coif wrought with gold, one with red and blue, two with black, as well as her two night coifs. Some are in the drawn work that offered ventilation as well as ornament. A charming effect is achieved with white work against a background stitched all over in strong gilded thread.

The men's caps are perhaps the more surprising in their extremely prosaic pudding basin shape, with four vertical seams meeting on the crown, sometimes topped with a small ornament, and a narrow turn-up embroidered brim. It has long been realised, of course, that they were for informal wear when wigs were removed and were night caps largely in name: at night men more usually wore plain biggins of knitted wool or quilted stuff—small children two or three on top of each other. But the name is traditional. A MS. at the College of Arms directs that Henry VIII's effigy was to wear under the crown "a night cappe of blak satten set full of stone and gold". By James I's time they were popular for all informal home wear, and even for an occasional portrait sitting: for Phineas Pett in the National Gallery, for example, and Sir Henry Spelman; the Earl of Nottingham at Greenwich and Baron Howard of Effingham, though the choice seems strange for a Lord High Admiral of the forces that defeated the Armada, in full robes of the Order of the Garter. A few men's night caps of the early 18th century are embroidered with delicate flower patterns on silk, but the usual floppy style of this period lent itself better to plain velvet. Linen was usual at night and the familiar tasselled bag of Victorian picture books continued until late in the 19th century. Thomas Moore in his trade card of the 1760s or 1770s lists various "frame knit" dress details including cotton, thread, silk and worsted caps. Some embroidered house caps for informal daytime

wear remain from as late as the mid-19th century, too, as well as the long-familiar tasselled pork-pie smoking cap.

The women's cap or coif of Elizabethan and early Stuart days is a more becoming bonnet shape and was worn with formal dress or under a hat as well as informally. The style remaining from this period, usually about 8 or 9 inches square when made up, is cut out in a single piece and seamed along the top of the head, gathered at the crown, perhaps with a small button, and at the bottom with a drawstring, and the outline is softened with rounded shaping down the sides. Some coifs of Charles I's reign covered only the coil of plaited hair and did not tie under the chin. Cauls, too, were worn off the face, resting on the back hair, and were more delicate than coifs, such as the one Elizabeth I wore to visit Cambridge in 1564 "set with pearles and precious stones", or the caul of cloth of tinsel Mary Tudor wore on her pre-coronation entry into London under a circlet of gold "the same call and circle being so massy and ponderous that she was fain to bear up her head with her hand". The forehead cloth is a long triangle embroidered to match the coif, worn over it with the point towards the back, and secured with tie strings under the chin.

The Howard accounts for Naworth Castle in the 1620s indicate what trifles these caps were considered: "a drawn work coif for my lady, 4*d*."; "drawing 2 coifs of my lady's and for the cloth, 12*d*." Robert Atkinson, Newcastle merchant, stocked velvet night caps in 1596, three being valued at 6*s*. 8*d*.

Margaret Laton in the anonymous portrait (Fig. 40) wears cap and tunic embroidered to match. This portrait is the more interesting since the original tunic still exists. The portrait immediately explains the somewhat unfinished appearance of the tunic's neckline, for the wearer's big lacy collar extends from chin to shoulder and completely hides the garment's small edging of gold lace. Waistcoats or tunics of this period seldom come the way of the small collector but museum collections are well worth examination. As among caps one may note a relaxation of formal ornament into life-like flower work but with more scope for imaginative designs: some Stuart work includes pictorial details

of country landscapes. One in the Earl of Northampton's collection embroidered with moss work vine leaves and grapes in gold and silver and silk was valued at £8 in 1614. This, typically, was of white taffeta. The vermicular style of quilting is noted as a background ornament on some 17th-century waistcoats and occasionally one finds the far finer effect of formal quilted patterns.

In 1600 Elizabeth I possessed 85 doublets, but no fewer than 136 of the long triangles of embroidery now usually known as stomachers, including perhaps the one worn by her wax effigy at Westminster Abbey. In the Day McCormick collection of embroideries in Boston Museum of Fine Arts a tunic embroidered with thick coiling stems and daffodils, all sparkling with gilded and silver thread, dotted with spangles and lined with yellow taffeta, is matched not only by coif and forehead cloth but by a stomacher too. This is a rare treasure, but stomachers, richly embroidered and treated as individualistic costume details, continued in 18th- and 19th-century fashion and are thus exceptionally interesting to collectors today.

Admittedly their shape is dull. The nearly straight edge across the top may measure 6 inches, perhaps, or as much as 15 inches; with the sides, usually between about 12 and 18 inches long, sloping into a rounded point or to a very narrow waist with an inch or two of greater fullness below, often scalloped or cut in overlapping tassets when these were in fashion for tunic and glove. The stomacher's purpose was to give decorative emphasis to the narrow waist achieved with the corset whilst masking the outline of that fierce contraption and filling the opening of the tunic. Thus it came into fashion with every revival of the slender waist that balanced width of sleeve or skirt, being tied or pinned inside the bodice opening.

Often a specimen shows sockets for a wide stay busk but in any case the whole style of the embroidery is designed to give immense firmness as well as rich beauty of colour and design, as suggestive as possible of the magnificent jewellery that might otherwise appear in this position in dazzling array. The Elizabethan with her exceptionally deep stomacher, purled and jewel-hung, added to the emphasis

by outlining the point with a long heavy necklace or with a girdle weighted by a hanging chain in front bearing book or pomander. The effect was lost of course when the stomacher point rested uneasily on the padded cartwheel farthingale.

The straight top of the stomacher might be softened with a less heavily embroidered partlet, or the edge might be hidden under a lace collar. Sometimes it matched the sleeves, but usually contrasted boldly with the bodice. It was, of course, only one style among several for balancing the inverted triangle of showy petticoat in and out of favour below, an alternative to the closed bodice, for instance, stiffened with whalebone and worn with false sleeves. But the 1640s saw it regain an importance it retained until late in the 18th century. Mid-17th-century stump work figures may wear exquisitely embroidered stomachers among their lace and pearls.

A few stomachers that remain bear the familiar coiled stem patterns of Elizabethan and early Stuart days, worked on linen in silks and metal threads, or lozenge diapers containing individual flower slips. Some that may be dated to the later 17th century are of satin or sarcenet stiffened with canvas or buckram linings and rich with more exotic flowers. The association with jewellery has always tended to prompt stomacher designs rich in heavy gilded formalities, but more delicate white work on linen has been noted too, designed for stiffening with the stay busks of baleen whalebone or wood that are themselves collectors' treasure, their pictorial ornament, dates and initials indicating their one-time value as gifts.

The interesting details of dress permitted to female servants in James I's reign in association with the Acts of Common Council regarding apprentices' clothing, which restricts all their wearing apparel of linen cloth to material costing five shillings or less the ell, stipulates that any neckerchief, gorget or stomacher must be plain. For greater emphasis, a few sentences later the girl is forbidden "any stomacher wrought with any gold, silver, or silk or with any kind of stuff made of or mixed with silk". *The Spectator* in 1714, suggesting ways in which mothers could encourage

their daughters in needlecraft, proposed the rule "that before every fresh humble servant she should be obliged to appear with a new stomacher at the least". Many that remain suggest amateur work.

In the early 18th century an obvious method of stiffening the stomacher was with quilting. This may be the particularly attractive corded or so-called Italian quilting or in an elaborate formal pattern in harmony with the quilted petticoat worn in the later 17th century and again in Anne's reign and later, and occasionally even matching it. But more frequently the quilting stitch is no more than the speedy vermicular or meandering yellow backstitch line that requires no careful consideration of symmetry and the stomacher is merely stiffened thereby, depending for ornament upon the lively embroidery worked upon it in chain, satin and similar covering stitches. This at its best has an Oriental grace even when the exotic flowers are in the substantial style associated with early 18th-century dress aprons. An alternative is glossy satin stitch against a shimmering background of couched silver thread, as on an example at Platt Hall, Manchester.

The richest stomachers were still jewelled. Mrs. Delany wrote in 1754 of "settling the jewels and clothes for the Birthday. The Duchess of Portland's is white and silver ground, flowered with gold and silver, and a stomacher of white satin, covered with her fine *coloured* jewels and *all* her diamonds. Lady Betty is to have . . . loops and stars of diamonds between on blue satin for her stomacher . . ."

Mrs. Delany herself appreciated the value of contrast in the finer detail of embroidered stomacher: on a court dress petticoat of black satin she worked a border of big hollyhocks, thistles and other flowers and massed foliage with flower sprays above; the black satin gown and train with this were studded with minute flowers but the stomacher was of soft black velvet, divided into compartments by narrow white lace and in each compartment she embroidered a sprig of white jessamine and a blue bow, no two alike.

As in previous reigns, the early Georgian stomacher was but one possible bodice filling and English stomachers

COSTUME EMBROIDERIES

always tended to be less elaborate than many worn on the Continent. Simple dresses often had no front bodice opening. In other instances the stays, made in the so-called English style to lace at the back, were suitably embroidered; an alternative here was a stomacher criss-crossed with lacing to suggest the French, front-lacing stays, although one purpose of the stomacher was to cover such stay-lacing. In this case the long triangle was flanked by overlapping side pieces ending below the waist in ribbon-bound tabs suitable for the jacket bodice of the 1740s-60s: these were embroidered to match the stomacher and eyelet-holed to take a silk lacing cord, although often the style was purely decorative. Many stomachers in this style are plain, the side pieces pinned under the bodice and masked by the flat revers from neck to waist known as robings, with some form of dress handkerchief to provide an ornamental filling.

As an alternative to embroidery one sometimes notes a stomacher ornamented with a ladder of ribbon bows diminishing to the waist, a fashion retained from the ribbon-delighted late Stuarts, noted by Evelyn in 1690 and continued in favour by 18th-century jewellers. This would be more effective than stitchery when embroidery was introduced on the bodice robings about the mid-century. Or the stiff triangle might be replaced by a false front buttoning down the centre. Early in George III's reign a gown might require what amounted to an inverted stomacher, known as a zone, but stomachers also continued in fashion until the change to classical styles near the end of the century.

Inevitably the tight-laced waist returned in the 19th century with contrasting breadth above and below and by the 1840s the stomacher was in fashion again. The London Museum has one of white satin worn by Victoria's mother in about 1845-50 and others worn by Victoria herself in the 1850s. These include one with a turndown collar, but the traditional rich embroidery, the sense of jewelled splendour conveyed with padded floss silks and metal purl, was long forgotten in gentilities of ribbon bows and delicate lace.

Another collectable item of home-embroidered dress is

the smock-frock. Smocks run little risk nowadays of being thrown away, but collectors of old embroideries may well wonder how so little should be known factually today about a garment that reached its greatest elaboration in the early 19th century, less than 150 years ago. Even the name it is usually given today is incorrect. The ornamental embroidery that has now taken over the word smock is indeed a far cry from the shift or chemise, the woman's equivalent of the man's shirt, that constituted a smock in Chaucer's day and was still long and plain and white in Victoria's reign. Properly the garment here under review is a smock-frock but here again an old meaning has been lost for a frock no longer suggests a man's outer wear. There is thus no longer the hint of derision once suggested by a man being frocked in a woman-style chemise. But the confusion of terms may worry the tyro collector still struggling to distinguish between, say, pinnars and aprons, or laces, lacis and lace.

Loose linen garments for farm work—"slops"—have served country labourers from very early times but records are remarkably scanty. Probably their occasional ornament with surface embroidery is scarcely less ancient but we have only an occasional reference, as when Jasper Mayne in *The City Match*, 1639, refers to a Puritan wife's embroideries

She works religious petticoats; for flowers
 She'll make Church histories; besides
 My smock sleeves have such holy embroideries . . .

An occasional detail of smocking may be noted on 17th-century baby caps. But references to smock-frocks are nearly always of the 19th century, and it appears that even by the 1860s there was a tendency to associate them with nostalgic memories of past days when snow-white smock-frocks made rough-and-ready farm hands feel fit to take their part in the morris dances of Plough Sunday or the raucous merriment of a harvest supper. Contemporaneous pictures suggest that even in their early 19th-century heyday the smock-frocks we now admire were very far from universal for country work. Indeed, on such pictures as show them at all it is difficult to discern any smocking. In

Morland's "The Dram", for example, the man at the inn door undoubtedly wears a smock-frock, gathered in some way to provide fullness at the centre of the back and with typical shoulder epaulettes. But it is impossible to discern any detail of smocking or surface embroidery. A woman artist might have been more informative.

Certainly smock-frocks had much to recommend them. Thomas Hardy refers to their "pillow case cut": it is the embroidered gathering that makes a loose, comfortable garment for hard work out of a rectangular bag, perhaps a yard wide below the shoulder yoke and some 40 inches long with sleeves set into the shoulders at right angles, wide too and equally unshaped save for the triangular gussets at the armpits and the cuffs below the gathered smocking on the sleeves. The smocking is of course the garment's triumph, resilient yet neat and hard wearing, giving an easy but reasonably close fit from shoulder yoke to waist, with wide panels of smocking back and front, easing the shoulders with an inch-wide gathering on the top of each sleeve and neatening the forearm with more smocking down to the buttoned cuff. Sometimes the garment is put on over the head, being identical back and front; sometimes it buttons part way down or all down the front.

Characteristically, in the fine specimens that remain, the smocking is in a wealth of patterns, diamonds, basket work, ropes and waves, and the garment is often further enriched with surface embroidery in stem stitch, herringboning, chain stitch and the 19th century's popular feather stitch, in scrolls, hearts, leaf shapes. This appears on the front, flanking the smocking, on the collar and on the shoulder yoke or on the "epaulettes" that often cover the shoulder seams.

Inevitably some collectors have sought to give exact interpretations to all this surface embroidery—leaves for the woodman, wheels for the carter and so on—but the style of the work suggests a more general pleasure in the kind of abstract patterns that will most quickly and adequately give strength and surface variety to the places most subject to wear—from the pull of the smocking or the rub of the whip or crook—and the hardest to scrub clean.

This surely is preferable in a garment that is essentially functional in every detail, a remarkably efficient compromise for men—ploughmen, drovers, shepherds and the like—who must work hard in every kind of English weather. The fabric may be linen or a heavy cotton drill. Before the development of cheap rubber waterproofs it offered reasonably showerproof covering that would throw off considerable light rainfall before becoming soaked—even the epaulettes protecting the vulnerable shoulder seams. It was useless of course against heavy rain, but at least, and this was important, it could be dried fairly quickly under the primitive home conditions of a country labourer. It must have offered some protection from wind and briar too, but probably became associated especially with carter and drover as a dust coat, and, like the woman's sunbonnet, a loose, light protection from the sun and flies associated with the many country journeys that could only be undertaken when the tracks were summer dry.

In addition to the most usual white-embroidered white and unbleached linen, smock-frocks might be black, worked in white, or grey or greenish-buff worked in white or blue. William Howitt in *Rural Life of England*, written in the late 1830s-40s, declares: "Such is the farm servant, whether you see him in his white, his blue, his tawny, or his olive-green smock-frock, in his straw hat or his wide-awake, according to the prevailing fashion of different parts of the country." Already, however, any distinction of work or locality that these differences may represent is difficult to elucidate.

Later collectors may face the added confusion of the smock—and here the word is no longer smock-frock—that delighted "artistic" ladies of the 1880s, "cut exactly like a farm labourer's" and worn with a belt. The most curious outcome of such enthusiasm for smocking at this date, however, is its use on ladies' skirts when a change in fashion in about 1876 banished the full skirt in favour of a close fit nearly to knee level with the fullness controlled by smocking so as to provide the required voluminous folds at the ankle.

Shoes and slippers are not difficult to collect. Heel-less silk or velvet "slippers" (mules) of the 17th century may be splendidly worked in the vivid manner of their day, showing

the long, pointed, square-ended toe of the 1660s-90s, and shoes of satin or white kid may be embroidered with coloured silks on the pointed toe and above the deeply waisted heel of Anne's reign. Many shoes from the early 18th century, both men's and women's, are in brocade; others are embroidered with tough silver thread and the beads and spangles that delighted early Georgians, or with strips of braid known as lace. But one finds brightly coloured, naturalistic flower embroidery too, all around the women's pointed shoes of the 1750s with the high peg heels that brought many caustic remarks about tottering ladies and their walking sticks.

The ultimate in coquettish gaiety was the shoe with diamonds down the back seam. More embroidery, but slight, appears on footwear of the late 18th century: for instance on the heel-less slippers with very pointed toes of the 1790s. Even some Georgian overshoes are embroidered but their purpose in protecting daintier shoe embroideries is hampered since they must be cut clear of the shoe toes lest they rub the stitchery. But at least the strong leather sole gave some protection, and for country wear there were high, iron-ringed pattens. As seemingly remote today, however, are some of the many embroidered slippers of the 19th century, and especially the mid-Victorian's boots or bottines, white satin perhaps, lacing up the side, or scarlet or yellow embroidered with self-coloured silk.

Embroidery on stockings is even slighter. To men the clocks and borders were but obvious methods of making constructional details, but with women they offered the delights of daring: much could be written of the ennui and frustration that prompted women's fashions for brilliant coloured stockings and touches of sparkling embroidery. Charles, when he hid in the Boscobel oak, wore woodman's clothing but his own stockings and had to have the tops cut off them because of their embroidery. A century later when the cabriolet was all the rage men wore these absurdities embroidered on their stockings, just as ladies sported them as patches on their faces.

Throughout the 18th century coloured stockings were fashionable for women, scarlet especially in the earlier part

of the century, held by ribbon garters tied above or below the knee—and these, too, may be embroidered, or woven with suitable mottoes. *The Spectator* applauds the opportunity for the embroiderer to “crowd a thousand Graces into a pair of Garters”. According to contemporary comment “great offence was taken at the Queen’s late ball at Buckingham House from a young Caledonian lady of fashion appearing in a silver gauze dress so festooned up—à l’Amazone—as to make at every sweep of the Scotch reel the motto on her garter legible which was *L’Amour* embroidered in gold”. Embroidery may be noted even where no constructional detail has to be masked on the crudely shaped ankle, worked in gold or silk, some in vivid satin stitch flower patterns, and preference for white stockings with flowers about the ankles was carried into the 19th century. But it was left to the mid-19th century and later Victorians to indulge in really elaborate stockings, striped and spotted. Some were embroidered up the front, a fashion that continued even when slender black stockings came into vogue in the 90s.

This prudish century had a liking, too, for amateur ornament on men’s braces, which were popular gifts. The embroidered canvas and cotton and painted velvet of the 1840s were followed by gaudy Berlin wool work. Dr. Cunningham has found delightful references to these in early Victorian novels. Cuthbert Bede’s country swell, Mr. Pacey, chose “white satin forget-me-not embroidered braces” but Mr. Verdant Green went up to Oxford “with a pair of braces from Mary worked in an ecclesiastical pattern of a severe character”.

Chapter Seventeen

GLOVES

THE golden handshake was performed in style in Elizabethan and Stuart days, with silken stitchery, heavy coils of bullion, twinkling spangles and sparks of jewels. Massively embroidered gloves were presented on every sort of occasion, to flatter a monarch, to seal a bargain, to thank a judge or to woo a lady, and who is to know now how often the palm was sweetened with more than jessamy butter or benzoin? Sir Thomas More found a tactful way of alluding to such a practice when offered a pair of gloves by a Mrs. Croaker, grateful because a case was decided in her favour. He accepted the gloves but added "Their lining you will be pleased otherwise to bestow"—in this case the considerable sum of forty angels.

From the 7th century, however, gloves have tended to be significant costume details in Europe and symbols of authority in palace and church. Early English kings wore them to their graves. The armoured knight of the Middle Ages flaunted his lady's glove in his helmet and the traitor divested of office had his stripped from his hands by a jibing valet retained for the purpose, as happened to the Earl of Carlisle in the reign of Edward II. But most especially gloves are associated with auspicious occasions. One is reminded of Elizabeth I at Cambridge in 1578 promising to be mindful of the University, so reports would have it, because so touched by the sight and scent of sixty-shilling gloves "garnished with embroidery, and goldsmiths wourke", grotesquely misshapen to flatter her long fingers; and of George III and Queen Charlotte among the Worcester glovers in 1788 starting a fashion that soon had even small children in gloves above their elbows.

Inevitably gloves became involved in customary obligations. Typically, by the late 16th century tenants of the Pewterers' Company were expected to welcome the granting of a new lease by making presents of a fat buck, or a march-pane confection, and a pair of gloves to each of the Company's assistants.

An early pair of long, straight-gauntleted gloves is seen in the portrait of William Smallwood, Master of Pewterers' Company four times between 1469 and 1486. In 1719 the Ironmongers' Company took an undertaker to task when he buried one of their members for failing to supply not only the customary gloves to the master, warden and clerk of the Company, but also to each of them a memorial ring within the glove.

The gloves that delight the collector are, of course, a minute fraction of the numbers made merely for use. In days when sepsis and tetanus and other infections were terrifying mysteries, every worker sought to protect his hands. Peasants wear them in the 14th-century Luttrell Psalter illustrations and old records are full of charges for gloves supplied to labourers, bricklayers, carpenters, hedgers: 12 pairs for 18*d.* (Pewterers' Company, 1497-98), 6 pairs for 18*d.* (Coopers' Company, 1545), 5 pairs for 20*d.* (Turners' Company, 1604). John Johnson, Darlington merchant, in 1592, stocked white gloves for weddings at 3*d.* a pair, washed (scented) gloves at 6*d.*, shag gloves at 1*s.* 6*d.*, and many others unspecified. Even a man of means would have plain gloves too. Sir Roger Widdrington of Harbottle Castle, Co. Durham, had six pairs of plain gloves to his three pairs of gold and silver embroidered gloves in their leather bag and his two wrought gold and silver purses. Yeovil, Chester and Worcester have records of glovers from as early as 1327 and a London Glovers' Company was in existence by the mid-14th century, incorporated in 1556. England made mostly coarse-grained leather gloves from the oil-tanned skins of deer and sheep, leaving France and Spain to supply the fine-grained alum-tanned leather such as glacé kid. For centuries Perth, Worcester and Limerick were famous for their gloves. J. G. Krünitz, writing in the 18th century, recalled an

already ancient saying that three countries were needed to make a good kid glove—Spain to cure the hide, France to cut it and England to sew it.

It was in direct contrast to the workman's need of protective gloves that the lady and gentleman of leisure declared by their gloves' rich ornament their freedom from manual labour, and by their fragrance dissociated their hands from unsavoury contacts with their surroundings. Henry VIII favoured the German fashion for gloves taken to their extreme of uselessness with the fingers slit, revealing his pompous rings. He favoured, too, the Italian fashion for gloves of knitted silk and for scented gloves. Reference has been noted to scented gloves costing 3*s.* 4*d.* in 1526, but it was Elizabeth who promoted this refinement.

Henry's daughter Princess Mary received notable gifts of scented and gold embroidered gloves, but her records concern mainly the outpayments involved, for every servant bringing a gift had to be rewarded, a perquisite so important at that time that she found it necessary to make special payment to a servant she did not send out with New Year gifts . . . "September 1544, to a gentleman of my Lord Admiral bringing a coffer with x payr of Spanyneshe Gloves from a Duches in Spayne—3*os.*"

Elizabeth I was forever toying with her gloves to display her delicate, restless fingers, and had a mistress of the sweet coffers just to look after her gloves in their fragrant boxes. The term Oxford gloves comes from her delight in the perfume of some gloves the Earl of Oxford brought her from Italy in 1564 "trimmed onlie with foure tuftes of roses in culler'd silk". Thereafter gloves bearing this perfume were Oxford gloves, even plain ones for use, selling at 1*s.* 2*d.* a pair. The fastidious could buy jessemy (sweet white jasmine) butter at a shilling an ounce to rub into their gloves; or buy their gloves scented with civet or musk. All the scents of the period's spice boxes are to be noted among 16th- and 17th-century gloves—cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and the rest. A recipe for scenting gloves includes angelica water, rose water, ground cloves, ambergris, musk, aloeswood, benzoin and carduus aromaticus, boiled and strained so that the gloves could be soaked repeatedly in the liquid.

Other givers relied on Elizabeth's eye for rich ornament, such as Lady Mary Grey in 1578 with her two pairs of gloves with four dozen decorative buttons or acorns of gold "in every one a pearl", or Lady Mary Sidney with "a pair with twenty-three buttons of gold with a diamond in each".

A few pairs of ornamental gloves remain from the 16th century, the fingers obviously too long for the wearer, the thumb insertion treated importantly with outline stitches or more elaborate embroidery. The pair worn by Elizabeth I when she visited Oxford in 1566 is preserved at the Ashmolean. These are of fine white kid worked with gold thread and heavy purl in a compartmented formal pattern, forerunner of the tab outline. The gauntlets widen less at the wrists than appears to have been customary then, and are slit at the side and joined by lace-edged loops. They are edged with yellow, lined with drab-coloured silk and enriched with gold fringe. As for their fit, the thumb is a full five inches long and the palms three and a half inches across, the entire glove almost eighteen inches long. Many 17th-century gloves too have long fingers, especially the little finger—but might well fit the attenuated hands that flattering portrait painters then gave to their sitters and that even doll-makers sought to copy.

The more numerous gloves of the early 17th century tend to measure about 12 inches long for women, 16 or 17 inches for men, the women's usually being the more interesting to the embroiderer. They are indeed fascinating. They may be worked crudely enough, and are showy rather than beautiful, with the kind of superficial good looks that might be required of a short-lived gift comparable with the costly gift purses of the period (see Chapter 18). The material is most usually doeskin, even the stitching of the finger seams often decoratively finished with braid or chain stitch or double herringboning over the basic stitching. Kid and lambskin were other favourites.

The main ornament spreads all over the gauntlet and sometimes down the palm (the pattern being viewed with the fingers pointing downwards) but more often is confined to the cuff. It is worked on white silk or satin, cut out and applied to the leather, silver-gilt thread and coloured silks

being applied in surface-covering satin stitch and couched work, the colouring often dominated by pink, bright green and blues, with some yellows and browns. In shape the most typical cuff at this period is divided into a series of six or eight lobes or tabs, often edged on three sides with the bobbin lace of silver-gilt thread that also masks the union of glove and cuff. Rounded lobes were introduced in Elizabeth's reign and square ones in the first years of the 17th century. "Wings" between the tabs, like duck's foot webbing, and matching the lining fabric, may be noted, enabling the cuff to spread out over the long tunic sleeve. Each tab may contain a different individual motif, such as a stylised flower, above the more general design which may be alive with lions and phoenixes, or hearts pierced with arrows, or may be restricted to more formalised flowers.

One pair at the Victoria and Albert Museum has phoenixes and green cranes on the six tabs and gold squirrels and honeysuckle below. Lord North's *Household Book*, 1581, notes an expenditure of 50s. on "froggs and flies, for the Queens gloves". A pair associated with James I has crowned roses and thistles upon the tabs, raised and padded, and lion, lamb and two snails below. Seed pearls are sewn thickly into this work, encrusting the snail shells and other details. Oxford University paid £6 for a pair for James in 1605, "the turnover wrought with pearl". Silver-gilt purl may take the rub of wear and spangles contribute to the glitter as on a pair of white kid gloves in Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery, worked in black silk and silver and edged with silver lace.

A splendid glove and matching pouch in the Glasgow Museum, part of a gift hawking set from James I, is elaborately worked all over the leather gauntlet with a closely scrolling design of blackberries—flowers, fruit and thorny stems—intermingled with mistletoe. Here, incidentally, the pattern is intended for viewing with the hand held aloft, supporting the bird. A button on the cuff fits a loop in the braid of hood and lure.

Another pair of gloves associated with James I is of brown leather lined with soft white skin, the seams sewn with silk and gilded thread and the gauntlets richly

embroidered in metal threads on dark crimson satin, lined with crimson silk and edged with fringe of crimson silk and gilded thread. The crimson ribbon cuff bands are edged with open wrought loops of gold wire. These are the more interesting because they resemble some that Horace Walpole displayed at Strawberry Hill in 1769. At a sale in 1759, reported in the *London Chronicle*, the gloves given by James I to Edward Denny sold for £22 1s. od. James's son Henry, Prince of Wales, shared his father's fondness for rich gloves and as a boy of fourteen acquired no fewer than 31 pairs in 1608.

Here again one can trace the typical styles from the prohibitions laid down for apprentices in James I's reign. They were forbidden gloves costing more than 1s. a pair, or with fringes, or any garnishing of gold or silver lace, velvet lace or silk lace or ribbon.

The Glovers' Company received a new charter in 1638 and some elaborately trimmed gloves remain from the middle and late years of the 17th century, embroidered with metal threads and silk upon the back of the hand and around the thumb, and heavily fringed and brightly lined with silk. Raised work suggestive of the period's amateur stump work has been noted on gloves in the Spence collection, including figures, animals and whales or dolphins lurking in rocky pools beneath a smiling sun, in the manner associated with some glove boxes (Chapter 13). But by then the tendency was for greater use of massive fringes and knots of ribbon to match the absurd superfluity of bows upon the costume.

Before the middle of the 17th century some women in short-sleeved full dress wore gloves to the elbow in soft pliant leather or silk, held up by ribbon or bands of plaited horsehair. Some of these are embroidered on the back of the hand with flowers or the popular phoenix, with rosettes perhaps at the joins of the finger seams and the seams themselves ornamented with herringboning. Mary II wears elbow-length gloves in a late 17th-century mezzotint, conspicuously seamed down the little finger and up the arm and with three lines down the back of the hand. This latter fashion came from France and is noted too on an occasional 18th-century portrait—Lady Smith by Reynolds, for

GLOVES

instance—but more usually is associated with Victoria's reign. Doctor Willett Cunningham refers to long gloves for men, quoting Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, 1676: "He is indeed a pattern of modern foppery. He was yesterday at the Play, with a pair of Gloves up to his elbows."

Other mid-century gloves were shorter than before, the gauntlets reduced to brief decorative cuffs. Doeskin remained popular, and lamb and kid. The so-called chicken skin worn by women at night "To keep her Hands plump, soft and white" (Evelyn describing a trousseau of 1690) was really the finest skin of unborn calves and kids, so soft and pliant that it was used also for fans. And not only women believed in its powers: an 18th-century writer in the *Lady's Magazine* recounted a visit to Mr. Warren's cosmetic shop in Coventry Street for a pair of chicken skin gloves "because of their innocent, effectual quality of making the hands and arms white, clear, soft and smooth. I asked if the ladies used them. 'Yes', replied the shop man, 'and the gentlemen too, nine to one'."

White kid was popular too for mittens, relic of a 14th-century fashion among ladies for fingerless half-gloves. Other mittens are found in woven fabrics and the long-familiar lace. An Elizabethan pair in the Victoria and Albert Museum is of crimson velvet with tabbed cuffs of white satin, both richly embroidered in metal threads and silk. These may not be English but they indicate a fashionable style, with the fingers contained in a single pocket split across the front that folds back to release them if required, and with the thumb wholly enclosed.

One finds 18th-century mittens obviously intended to be worn with the finger peak turned back revealing colourful lining decorated with embroidery. There may be embroidery too to show when the arm end is turned back like a cuff. Other mittens allow the fingers and thumb-top free and many have openwork embroidery on the palm while preserving the hand and wrist from sunburn or freckling. The London Museum has several pairs of the early 18th century in white kid, including a pink-lined, silver-embroidered pair that once belonged to the first Duchess of Marlborough.

Embroidery is usually restricted to the back of the

finger-shield and this somewhat thin, trailing work is noted too on the backs of early 18th-century gloves in knitted silk, white, green, blue, and on gloves of the period in kid, chamois and chicken-skin. Queen Anne left some gloves behind her at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1702, now in the Ashmolean Museum, summer gloves with ornamental open-work on the palms.

Lady Grisell Baillie bought white silk gloves along with masks and jewellery. Her accounts in the 1700s abound with references to gloves bought by the dozen pairs: a dozen pairs for her husband, 15*s.*; nine pairs for herself, 18*s.* 9*d.*, and silk gloves 6*s.* 3*d.*; a dozen for one daughter, £1 5*s.* 0*d.*; and a dozen and three for the other girl £1 12*s.* 3*d.*; even for her grandchild four pairs of "little thread Mittons". Her accounts also mention glove and hood washings.

Some 18th-century gloves and mittens are silk of a pale fawn shade suggesting leather but suitable for rich embroidery comparable with the heavy, solid-petalled knot-centred flowers in silver-gilt found on the period's short ornamental aprons. Others again are in quilted linen, the stitching usually in white or yellow, and others sparkle with beads and spangles on the back of the hand, but entirely lack the 17th century's rich gauntlet work. The whole effect is most usually light and pretty—pale colours, frilly ribbons, dainty, insipid embroidery. The emphasis is upon women's gloves for men of fashion gave greater consideration to their elegant lace cuffs. It is understandable that Thomas Moore should state on his trade card (1756-7) that he "makes and sells . . . Thread, Cotton, Worsted and Silk Mitts and Gloves" and also silk purses: the whole technique is comparable. Hawkers of early Georgian days often peddled gloves in the Mall and the Park, along with ribbons and artificial flowers and the smoothest mouseskin eyebrows. In 1785 when William Pitt imposed a small purchase tax on gloves—not very successfully—he estimated that three million people might wear at least one pair of gloves a year, and some as many as 20, 30 or 40 pairs.

Occasionally one finds a glove of the last quarter of the century printed instead of embroidered, with an Adamesque design of classical urn, ribbons and swags and perhaps even

a tiny sentimental figure of "Charlotte" or the like (see Chapter 6). Some have topical themes, inevitably including the balloons of the 1780s.

When George III and Queen Charlotte visited the Worcester glove factory in 1788 it set the seal of high fashion on the custom of wearing long gloves tied above the elbow "to preserve the arm in beauty of womanhood".

Gentlemen of fashion, too, took to gloves again in the 19th century, fit and figure having replaced fabric and ornament as the criterion of good taste. Disraeli wore several rings outside his white gloves at a dinner party in 1853 (not to mention his scarlet waistcoat and purple trousers), and Count d'Orsay ruled that a gentleman could not wear fewer than six pairs a day, including silk-embroidered fine kid "canepin" at the ball. To the collector, however, the early glories are long forgotten. Even on women's gloves coloured embroidery is slight, apart from some silver stitchery on wedding gloves. These are indeed a far cry from the splendours of Elizabethan and Stuart days, but at least one tradition—Elizabethan if not far older—still prevailed and a girl who kissed a man caught sleeping in her presence could still claim a pair as forfeit fairly won.

Chapter Eighteen

OTHER DRESS ACCESSORIES

I. *Aprons*

THE frock of the labourer became the aristocratic frock coat; the Teddy boy's deplorable trousers have achieved respectability as tapered cut. Time and again fashion in dress has defied the rules of caste, and never more conspicuously than in the story of the apron. From Elizabeth I until Victoria the humble, necessary aprons of working women were copied, parodied, transformed into gay or exquisite adornment expressly to declare their wearers' leisured gentility. In the street and the drawing room just as in herb garden and still room the mistress of the house drew subtle distinction between herself and her menials by the quality of fabric and grace of design. Today some of the charming little elegancies are highly valued by collectors.

In general design they kept to the obvious pattern, the fabric being gathered at the top along a narrow hem threaded with a tying waist-band. A few were in fact pinafores rising above the waist and pinned, and some achieved a somewhat similar effect with trimming to match the bodice handkerchief, but the Continental apron with a tiny, token bib was rarely noted in England. Variety came in length and fullness, shaped outline, edge trimmings, embroidery and fabric texture.

Chaucer gave the carpenter's wife in his miller's tale an ample apron "ful of many a gore". For a long period it must have been proof enough of leisure or fastidiousness to wear an apron that by any stretch of the imagination could be described, as hers, "whyt as morne milk". Hers was probably plain and long. In some examples a fuller, more

decorative effect was achieved when only the central portion of the top hem was attached to the waistband, so that the fabric hung in heavy folds to the sides. But in Tudor days aprons became involved more deeply and delightfully in the period's rich elaboration of fabric and ornament.

Chaucer called the apron by the homely name of "barne-clooth": Elizabeth I favoured "lappmantel", as absurd, as frivolous, as the articles themselves. In 1600 her monstrous wardrobe included eighteen of them, such as one of white plush ornamented midway with a strip of red swansdown. Silk plush and dyed swansdown were highly fashionable materials in the later years of her reign: both, in their delicate deep-textured softness, represented the ultimate in un-usefulness. Less exalted ladies might wear aprons of finest linen, embroidered in cutwork and trimmed with the period's lovely needlepoint lace. Cut-work—white on white in frosted cobweb effects—caught the derision of Stephen Gosson in his *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart New-fangled Gentlewomen*, 1596, when he referred to

These aprons white of choicest thred,
So choicely tied, so dearly bought,
So finely fringed, so nicely spread,
So quaintly cut, so richlie wrought;
Were they in worke to save their cotes,
They need not cost so many grotes.

This was a style that flourished in the 17th century. An occasional portrait catches their charm, such as little Barbara Cole, artist unknown, in the perfect lace edged apron, so full that two widths of wispy lawn go to its making, their join being treated with openwork enrichment. Far from the court circle women caught the same fashion. In 1585 the daughter of a Newcastle miller had "a new apron of durance laid with lace" as well as her two linen aprons, and her sister had one with "sylver keepers". Isabel Rood, widow of the prebendary of Durham Cathedral, at that time owned a "worsett apperin, two lynne apperings and a straken apperin" to wear with her six gowns, and probably only the last, of coarse hempen fabric, was for real work. A Devonshire woman was noted as possessing four gowns and petticoats, three hats, but nine aprons.

Towards the end of the 17th century, especially, aprons expressed the general enthusiasm for lace. Some were of lawn, deeply edged with lace; some made wholly of delicate needlepoint. Mary II in 1694 paid as much as £17 for one. There were black aprons as well as white by then, and frills for alternative trimming. A wedding trousseau of the 1700s might list a flowered muslin apron along with such other valued accessories as white gloves and silk handkerchief. That thrifty housekeeper Lady Grisell Baillie sent to Holland for her fine linens for aprons, and paid 7s. a yard for a scarlet apron for her daughter Rachy.

This was in 1717: A specimen at the Victoria and Albert museum dating to that year is of almost invisible muslin, exquisitely worked in darning, buttonhole and drawn thread stitching in a design of fantastic birds and flowers. Already some of the 18th century's particularly endearing fashions were becoming established. Throughout the century the apron dominated the scene and its changing moods are delightfully recorded by the many remaining examples, by a wealth of portraits, conversation pieces and genre studies, and by the porcelain figures that expressed to perfection the pseudo-pastoral sophistication of the beau-monde who bought them.

There was one obvious reason for the apron's popularity among the leisured. Time and again one notes the sitter's left hand displayed to advantage as it toys with the loose, delicate fabric, occasionally even while hampered with a cup of tea or with a baby on her knee. Previously a gauzy handkerchief had served as accessory. Even when Henry Singleton painted an alehouse serving-woman in a green working apron he gave her the same graceful affectation.

The unassailable status of the lady's apron is indicated clearly enough by its appearance in so many 18th-century portraits by the most expensive artists. One can think of delightful specimens in the work of more than a dozen major portrait painters. Sometimes a lesser figure appears on the family scene, as in Collet's "Discordant Matrimony", but it is the mistress of the household who wears the apron. Indeed even for the pseudo-work in Morland's "Industry" the sitter has turned aside her little apron to be safe from the

knitting pins and her work rests on her dark dress. For leisure the apron continued entirely acceptable for every social occasion until the 1790s.

These aprons are of two main varieties, long and short. The long may be further defined as reaching quite or almost to the dress hem, very full, usually white, and of a thin, often almost transparent, matt-textured cotton or linen fabric. It was the obvious successor to those of the previous centuries, even to its frequent lace edgings, and by the mid-18th century it tended to be associated more particularly with the older, more conservative woman. The short apron was a costly novelty of early Georgian days, often more than twice as wide as it was long, of substantial silk or satin, in a wide range of colours and vividly embroidered with silks and metal threads. Such guides as the *Lady's Magazine* indicate the obvious advantages of frequent changes in the fashion, but contemporary evidence suggests that the short only gradually took equal place with the long, and that by the second half of the century many women resorted to a knee-length compromise.

Zoffany, painting in England from about 1760, recorded both styles, sometimes, as in his portrait of the Graham family, both on the one canvas. But one feels the apron had little appeal to him, whereas to Hogarth it was a delight. In either style the extreme fullness at the top, whether informally gathered or neatly pleated, makes an attractive contrast to the long pointed bodice and its underlying corsetry, breaking the over-wide line of the variously hooped skirt. The long apron appeared to particularly good effect when delicately softening the heavy stitchery and harsh movement of the warmly quilted petticoat, as seen for example in Devis's study of the Swaine family, 1749, and was popular with the open-skirted Polonese that was the rage in the 1770s. Gainsborough in about 1750 painted his wife in a long apron, very plain and straight, but many were of spotted muslin or gauze or were sprinkled with flower slips in delicate white needle or tambour work, including finest drawn thread work—two yards of fabric, becoming ever more gossamer exquisite as the century advanced. Such minor patterning appeared more emphatic

when the fabric was gathered in the full frills or furbelows that usually edged sides and bottom and occasionally matched the wearer's elbow-concealing sleeve frills. One thinks particularly of Hogarth's girl portraits with their spring morning air in their frilly aprons—his Anne Wolstenholme in her white flowered muslin apron and muslin cap, or his captivating Graham children. Children, of course, had to have aprons for show to suit their unchild-like gowns. Four of the Prince of Wales's children wear huge aprons over their rich, heavy dresses in Barthélemy du Pan's garden group of 1746. George Washington in 1759 ordered two pinafores from London for his four-year-old stepdaughter, stipulating that their style should be in the current fashion.

As with such groups, one frequently notes long aprons in association with small unsophisticated caps and immense plainish skirts. Often, too, their wearers adopted the serving-maid's habit of bringing the apron strings round to the front to be tied in a neat but not very becoming bow. The sophistication of high piled hair was somewhat alien to the long diaphanous apron and called for the glossy elegance of the briefer style that stopped short of the closed gown's own elaborate patterns in self-coloured ruching.

When Beau Nash requested the Duchess of Queensberry to remove her apron at the Bath Assembly he insisted that white aprons were worn only by waiting women. It is easier to imagine his approval of the rich little silk and embroidered aprons that now somewhat disproportionately represent to us the 18th century's apron modes. These are the collector's gems, in heavy silk or satin, sometimes cream or yellow, occasionally other colours, rather than white, and offering great scope for the lively satin stitch embroidery vaguely termed Oriental. This is often dominated by somewhat large, exotic flowers and dotted with spangles, and the whole tone is emphatic, sometimes even strident. Even Mrs. Delany with her love of matt embroidery effects chose silk for embroidering aprons.

To buy, such aprons cost several pounds, but women's magazines offered many patterns. Some designs were more delicate, powdering the fabric with flower sprays in bright

floss silks or filling each petal and leaf with different diaper patterns; some were worked partly in silk gimp, and others couched with metal thread. Silver or silver-gilt bobbin lace formed a favourite edging, the most usual alternative being a frilly edge looped into a fly fringe.

In the hand the effect is of over-great width but in use the fullness of gathering or tucks ensured a good hanging line in spite of lack of depth. The heavy embroidery and attached edgings helped to supply necessary weight. Vertical slit pockets, emphasised by embroidery, were usable in some early specimens but were more often merely sham. Some aprons were of damask; some were quilted. Porcelain figures can scarcely be regarded as authoritative guides to the costume of their subjects but it is interesting to note how even here the apron proved a welcome accessory. A Bow figure may demonstrate the grace of the long flowing apron and a Derby lass may sport the gay short style.

More homely women, of course, even for dress occasions, kept largely to the longer and plainer mode and here one realises how stereotyped their fashions must have been. Wheatley's "Country Girl" wears one even for her wedding—tied in front—as well as in scenes of her maidenhood and courtship, and another gleams, full and white, in Morland's "Eloppement". Sophie von la Roche, visiting London in 1786, declared that "within an hour of my arrival in Suffolk Street I had grown fully acquainted with the costume worn by the maids, women of middle-class and the children . . . they mostly wear white aprons; though the servants and working women often appear in striped linen aprons". Fussell describing an English countrywoman of George III's reign indicates that a tenth of her yearly outlay on clothes and accessories would be spent on aprons. Morland, Singleton and others amply illustrate the vogue. In S. Wale's "Seasons", 1761, Summer, Autumn and Winter all wear aprons out of doors, even in a bleak little skating scene.

Regency styles offered little opportunity for aprons although one notes an occasional fashion print with a long, narrow apron of muslin or lace hanging from a high waist, narrow at the top and wider below to suggest a slender waist. Around 1830 they reappeared in greater numbers,

short and full, with pouchy pockets, in coloured or black silk or satin of the stiff, slightly repellent, good quality associated with Victorian fashions and indeed continued by Victorian ladies for forty years or more, trimmed with lace or jet. Some had small bibs and often the black silk bore coloured embroidery. In the 1860s they were often very small indeed. A whim of the 1870s was the introduction of a small apron as an alternative to a large, flat bow worn at the back to mask the gathered fulness of the skirt. Even in the 1880s there was a new interest in embroidered aprons, in the crash and pastel-shaded crewels that proclaimed escape from Berlin wool crudities, but the vogue was short, and there has been no real revival.

2. *Bags and Purses*

Small bags and purses, minor trifles in themselves, span the centuries with the constancy of favoured essentials. Women's pockets have been at the mercy of fashion but bags, it seems, have never been taboo. Plainly functional, even primitive, they have tended, nevertheless, to acquire some slight distinction. They are found alike among the earliest remaining secular embroideries and among the most recent of collectable trifles of Victoriana, "embroidered by the ladies themselves, being considered a pretty amusement and occupation".

Bags containing the seals for important documents remain from the 14th century. Guildhall, London, possesses one attached to a Charter that has been held by the Corporation of London since 1319. This is $5 \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ inches with heraldic motifs including tiny blue-mouthed lions and winged dragons, worked in cross and split stitch, eyelet holes and couching, in coloured silks and silver-gilt thread.

Seal bags are interesting examples of professional embroidery down the centuries, thickly covered with wear-resistant metal work, similar heavy couching being continued to the present day for such requirements as heraldic ornament. The royal seals, as symbols of authority, were important details in a monarch's public appearances. Elizabeth I on state occasions was preceded by her Lord

Chancellor bearing the seals in a magnificent bag embroidered with lion and dragon, crown and Tudor rose. A fine post-Restoration specimen of this professional work is described on page 166. The bag for the Chancellor's seal held by Francis North, later Baron Guilford (d. 1685) is included in the Burrell collection, Glasgow. The crown and royal arms are applied work in heavy relief, mostly in white and gold on a red velvet ground. The English rose and Scottish thistle motifs are linked to the letters CR for Charles II.

Heraldic devices are conspicuous on other early bags as well, such as the fascinating Calthorpe purse of the early 16th century at the Victoria and Albert Museum, closely worked in tent stitch in coloured silks and metal, 1250 stitches to the square inch, which is very fine indeed (although over 2,000 have been noted on modern work), to display the arms of twenty-one families—no fewer than forty-three armorial quarterings. This bag is four-sided instead of the more usual flat square or rectangle, and has a single tassel at the bottom where many have two or three. But one notes the familiar loop handles, and the draw-string round the top that remained characteristic of bags and purses almost to the zip-age.

Those small square bags or purses four or five inches square with draw strings and loop handles were suitable not only for seals but for charms, precious relics, the less showy forms of pomander and similar primitive medications. Many early portraits show such bags at knee level or lower on the long costly chains fashionable in Plantagenet days and continuing to the 1580s, such as Elizabeth Kirkhouse of Durham mentions in her will, 1586: "which I have in pawne for 40s."

Some bags that remain appear to have been made from scraps of old embroideries. Those of rich fabrics have seldom lasted—the satin and cloth of gold purses mentioned by Marion Chapman of Newcastle in 1583, the pair wrought in gold and silver that spendthrift Roger Widdrington used for his set of silver counters (1641), or the purse full of money elaborately concealed by Richard Belassis of Co. Durham in 1588, containing the then considerable sum of £60 in

"a little pourse of silke rybben, within a littell lether bagg, which is put within a white lether showe . . .".

As gifts to monarchs they were considerable items even though their purpose was but to grace gifts of money. "A fair purse of silk containing £10" is a familiar entry in Tudor records. The fourth Earl of Bedford, as described by Gladys Scott Thomson in *Life in a Noble Household* paid about nine shillings each year for the silk and silver embroidered purse he gave to Charles II containing £20 in gold.

Elizabethan and early Stuart purses or bags frequently have silver thread as wear-resistant background covering the linen and setting off the familiar flower motifs on thick coiling gilded stems, the peapods symbolically bursting open with fat little peas, the clumsy small birds and animals, butterflies and caterpillars that immediately declare their period. A. F. Kendrick has noted the resemblance to some patterns on the few remaining very early samplers, a resemblance lost in the more artificial sampler exercises that soon followed. There is interesting use of silk tent stitch in combination with metal threads in close lace stitches. Some bear inscriptions although this is a French trait and in England seldom goes much further than "the gift of a friend".

Patterns are simple and the main enrichment is found in the plaited silk and metal thread draw-strings, knobbed and buttoned and tasselled to keep the top tightly closed, and similar functional decoration along the base of the bag so that it will hang right way up. Sometimes a knob at the centre of the base is transformed into the centre of a flower in gilded lace, or there may be a flower on the draw-string. Before the end of the 16th century many coloured braids were available as well as metal thread work. Pattern books of braids and purse strings were issued in the 17th century showing ways of plaiting as many as a dozen strands and this small craft became an important minor accompaniment to embroidery, expertly worked by hand. It is interesting to note, however, that the curved hinged metal opening associated with recent purses was known in the 17th century. Dr. C. Willett Cunnington has noted a 1616 reference by

S. Rowlands in *Doctor Merry-Man* to "a leather Pouch with a Snap-hance shut".

Seventeenth-century bags continue these designs but one notes as an occasional alternative the shape known later as a pochette, particularly suitable for carrying books, with a flap attached to one side of the top heavily tasselled so that it would stay in place when dropped down over the other side. A bag would save much handling of an embroidered book cover. Devotional books might have bags embroidered with Biblical subjects and one finds emblematic figures and even an occasional stump work scene but tent stitch flowers have proved more enduring (see Chapter 7). Men's pocket wallets might be embroidered with considerable elaboration. One now in Lady Richmond's collection belonged to Admiral Sir William Penn, worked in coloured silks on a silver thread ground. On one side are the initials WP over a richly dressed figure with his dog and an astronomical globe; on the other side the arms of the Admiral and his wife.

Some of the most charming purses break free altogether from the rectangular shape, the flowers and fruit suggesting naturalistic outlines, but these often have a fresh unused appearance and probably were intended merely as elegant trappings of money gifts and never for use—a bunch of grapes in high relief topped by a vine leaf, a pair of bellows, or an open walnut worked in gilded thread, purl and pearls, three inches wide when opened on its gilded draw-strings.

Sometimes the bag has a smaller pin-pillow dangling on a cord, and occasionally is combined with a knife case. During the 17th century coiling stem patterns tended to give place to more formal designs, often still on a silver ground and twinkling with spangles, sometimes matching embroidered gloves. They conform to the established shape, about four or five inches square or slightly pointed below, with double draw cords and tassels. Tent stitch flowers and plaited braid stems may be replaced by symmetrical sprigs in rococo stitch on a ground of gobelin stitch.

Many 17th-century references are to be found regarding sweet bags. The leather purse, like glove and jerkin, was an obvious vehicle for the heavy scents popular in this strident

century, and perfume was a gracious finishing touch on the gaudy small purse conveying a gift of money. At the same time, in the loose terminology of those days, a sweet bag frequently proves to be what is known today as a sachet. These bags contained sweet powders or aromatic calamus, benzoin, storax, galingale, cloves and garden fragrance such as lavender, marjoram and rose petals. Similar powder would be scattered in clothes chest and linen closet: in 1590 the Starchamber accounts included a payment of 10s. "for sweet powder to cast among the napery". The Pewterers' Company in 1592 paid 18*d.* "ffor bagges of Roseleaves and lavender ffor the chest of lynnyn" and 4*s.* 6*d.* in 1620-21. Such sweet bags and pincushions are mentioned among the matching "furniture" of a toilet cover for a dressing table.

Magnificent, costly sweet bags are included in the Earl of Northampton's inventory, 1614, some embroidered both sides alike but more plainly "lined" (that is, backed or "bottomed"). Among them are references to bags for other purposes, a draw-string bag in the expected manner valued at 2*s.*, and bags that suggest costly gift wrappings: "a watchet [blue] gold tinsell grogeran bagge embrodered with leaves and flowers of golde in a running worke, 2*s.*", and "a white satter bagge imbrodered with a wreath of gold and greene silk leaves with burninge heartes roses and other flowers bothe sides alike 5*s.*".

Seventeenth-century bags faithfully reflect the more important embroidery work of their day. Some are work bags, as much as 20 inches square, still in the draw-string design, made as small extra pleasures by the women who hung their beds with superb crewel work hangings. These are of the cotton and linen twill that preceded all-cotton fabric for the hangings and tend to observe the same rules of pattern and colour. One at the Victoria and Albert Museum dated 1672 shows a last vestige of the coiling stem pattern, but the flowers are conventionalised and petals and leaves are enriched with fancy fillings. Another, in monochrome, shows figures of Hope and Faith. In late specimens one finds the sinuous, exuberant plants or trees springing from small earthy bases; the leaf outlines are but frames for interesting, varied fillings; the birds are Oriental exotics.

OTHER DRESS ACCESSORIES

In the early 18th century they reflect the increasing taste for Oriental gaiety, silk replacing wool, and design becoming more spidery.

Some early dress aprons have quite adequate pockets, and the full styles of skirt such as the mid-18th paniers permitted great use of concealed hanging pockets (see page 223). But bags and purses of quality were in great demand for cash and for the wholly delightful counters associated with the century's wild enthusiasm for card playing (Page 110).

Some charming bags remain from the second half of the 18th century, considerably larger than those of the previous century but essentially dainty. Many were quickly ornamented with chain stitch effects on satin in tambour work; and they proved particularly suitable, too, for fanciful notions worked out in stiff, gauzy aerophane, narrow silk ribbons and chenille. Work bags continued in use, even among those who scorned the embroidery or knotting that they purported to contain, and the last years of the century brought them into prominence: slender skirts banished the invaluable pocket and rendered a sizeable bag on the arm an "indispensable". Dr. C. Willett Cunningham quotes *The Times*, 1799: "Every fashionable fair carries her purse in her workbag . . . the new custom of carrying a bag with her handkerchief, smelling bottle, purse, etc."

It is remarkable perhaps to note still the draw-string top, the long ribbon loop handles, the square or rounded base with fringe or buttons but in the style of this most sophisticated period. Greater specialisation was coming into fashion, however, with letter cases and pocket book pochettes to be followed by cases for visiting cards, often worked on canvas in extremely fine tent stitch.

For money, by the 1780s but more especially in the 19th century there was also the stocking or miser purse. This somewhat uninteresting bag consists of a long tube of fabric carried by its middle so that the ends hang down, suitably weighted with beads or tassels even when no money has been inserted through the central slit. Often gilt ornament on one end and silver on the other show the user which end to fill with the more valuable coins. When the

coins have passed from the slit to one of the rounded "toes" of the purse a ring outside the fabric is moved over the slit and down towards the money so that it cannot slip back to the central opening. A second ring guards the other toe, similarly arranged to move up past the central opening when the user requires access to her coins and down again to secure them. These purses may be knitted or crocheted and for this reason the most usual ornament consists of wear-resistant beads, especially the cut steel beads that were made in great quantities in the Midlands and, when clean, have an attractive lustre. Some purses were worked inside out on long moulds, beginning at one end and working round and round to the other, in buttonhole stitch, each stitch taking in a single bead. In knitting or crochet the beads could be threaded on the skeined purse silk and taken into the stitches one at a time. Others were sewn on to woven fabric or hand-knitted work. Some miser purses have embroidered flower ornament. Decoration is never elaborate, consisting mainly of check patterns with an occasional appropriate squirrel, and, of course, fringes and tassels. They were still in use in the 1880s.

Beads receive fuller consideration in Chapter 15. They were used on purses and bags from the 17th century but never more attractively than on the large handbags of the 1760s, sewn on to fine canvas or net in dainty fadeless flower and basket designs. Eventually the pleasing mosaic effect was lost in the regular lines of bead weaving.

Nineteenth-century bags range from big tasselled work-bags to envelope purses so popular by the end of the Regency that even silver vinaigrettes were being made in this outline. Many bags were of velvet, some of net, though by the 1820s the name *reticule*, meaning network, was applied regardless of the material. Contemporary journals trace the progress of these reticules, round, lozenge-shaped, and some with arch-shaped hasps instead of draw-strings, offering opportunity for extremely attractive and well finished metal work. *Ackermanns Repository of the Arts*, 1812, for example shows a sleek, high waisted lady carrying a four-sided bag loop-handled from the tips of her fingers, in a shape that swells in the centre then curves to a tasselled

point at the base, scarlet to match shoes, cuffs and cape-lining in contrast to the grey clinging dress. A particularly attractive shape represents a basket of flowers, the basket stiff, the "flowers" formed by the embroidered fabric rounded in by a draw-string at the top. In 1827 *The World of Fashion* reported that the new watered silk reticules were "in the form of a heart".

Embroidery is seldom more ambitious than colourful flower sprays—in satin stitch and chain stitch, perhaps, on black or white satin, or in extremely fine tent stitch. As larger skirts permitted the return of pockets the bag receded into the background around the mid-19th century but soon returned, indispensable as ever to our cluttered, possession-ridden but remarkably capable great-grandmothers.

3. Pockets

Pockets are so personal that they have an appeal to collectors out of all proportion to their slight and often indifferent embroidery. Their scraps of decoration were intended for the users' own pleasure with little thought of display. Tudor and Elizabethan women carried small personal belongings on their long girdles, such as Mary Tudor's "comb case garnished with pearls" or Elizabeth I's "nedell case of crystall garnysshed with silver gilt, with twoo thymbles in it". But when girdles went out of fashion, protruding skirts came in and the obvious development was the introduction of pockets accessible through placket holes left in the overskirt. The early 18th-century delight in enormous skirts brought a revival of structural supports to replace the innumerable petticoats. False rumps soon gave place to the various hoops of cane, whalebone and the like worn until the 1780s, and to the end of the Regency for court dress. Many were dome-shaped and the smallest of these were known as pocket hoops, but this was probably merely in reference to their size. The oblong style now—but not at the time in England—known as the pannier hoop offered particularly convenient space for pockets, slits being arranged in the canvas that linked the hoops to the waist.

The most practical alternative was the apron pocket and some early 18th-century dress aprons have substantial ones, but later specimens usually display charmingly embroidered pocket slits that are no more than shams. In any case a woman's small valuables were carried more safely in pockets sewn on tapes tied round her waist under her big skirts—although not entirely safe even then, to judge by the boasting recorded of a pickpocket who specialised in removing such treasure.

The clinging "classical" dresses of the century's end could conceal no pockets. A sailor home from the sea was described at the time as astonished at his wife's change of dress:

But what, 'bove every thing beside,
Did Jack most furiously displease,
No pockets did she wear, to hide
Her pincase, wipe, and bunch of keys.

Early in Victoria's reign when skirts filled out again these might be ready equipped with sewn-in pockets. Hanging pockets were still used to some extent, however, and the increase of travelling by train among women prompted the development of "safety pockets".

At their most desirable today pockets are in pairs, still linked by the tape that tied them round the waist. The usual style is flat, bag-shaped, straight or rounded at the bottom and narrowing to the top where it is sewn to the tape. It is often larger than might be expected—perhaps 14 inches by 9 inches, with the slit most often vertical, perhaps half the depth of the pocket so that the most obvious embroidery consists of a plant design growing from the base and extending either side of the slit. Some have rich, substantial flower heads comparable with silk apron ornament, but there is a tendency for the work to be spindly and lacking much sense of design. Some are dated.

The most usual material is linen, or linen and cotton twill, lined perhaps with canvas and worked in wools or silks. The two thicknesses of material are often united by the quick vermicular quilting lines in yellow or white associated with much 18th-century commercial needlework. Chain stitch flowers, very bright and entirely unreal, may be noted

here. White work, too, associated with the outermost petticoat, was obviously considered suitable for these pockets. Lady Grisell Baillie in Anne's reign often bought material for pockets such as "1½ yards Damity for pokets 2s."

Patchwork on such a small scale seems a less obvious alternative, and Washington Irving, writing in 1809, might have been thought to refer to draw-string bags rather than pockets when he declared that every woman wore pockets "fashioned with patchwork into many curious devices". Nevertheless an occasional patchwork pocket remains, perhaps an attractive small relic of some schoolgirl task. One is illustrated in Averil Colby's *Patchwork*. Other pockets also strongly suggest children's struggles in needlecraft and resemble samplers of their day. A mid-19th-century pair in the National Museum of Wales is made of flannel embroidered in coloured wools in cross stitch: one bears an imperfect inscription and the name Sali Jones.

4. Muffs

For three centuries an alternative place of concealment for every kind of small treasure was the muff—and for men as well as women until the third quarter of the 18th century. Henry, Prince of Wales, in addition to his 31 pairs of gloves had a muff valued at £7 in 1608, in cloth of silver "wrought with pearls, plates and Venice twists of silver and gold", and another, of black satin, embroidered in black silk, priced at £3. Elizabeth I is reputed to have disliked their introduction to this country, suspecting, perhaps, their opportunities for subterfuge, but one is noted among gifts she received in 1600: "one snoskyn of crimson saten laide upon with perfumed leather cut, embroidered in Venice gold, silver and silke". There are occasional references in late 16th-century records to velvet muffs valued at a few shillings, such as Sir Robert Atkinson's, 2 shillings, in 1596, and a portrait may show a muff hanging from a woman's girdle as in the "English lady" engraved by Gaspar Rutz (1588), but they became more popular in the early 17th century.

Small muffetees appeared then, too, one for each hand or wrist in the manner that became popular again in the mid-

18th century not so much out of doors as among enthusiastic card players who thus controlled their magnificent lacy cuffs as well as keeping their fingers supple for cards and counters. Some remain from another brief vogue, among women, in the 1870s. Muffs were worn indoors and out throughout the 18th century. They varied widely in size until towards the end of the century men relinquished the comfortable fashion and women, shivering in scanty classical dress, took refuge in huge affairs of shaggy fur or superbly warm swansdown, their only association with the needlewoman being occasional ribbon ornament.

Embroidered muffs were probably always in the minority, but were more distinctively decorative. Fabrics included especially velvet and satin. Velvet might carry rich patterns in metal threads and satin display big flowers worked in floss silks and twinkling with spangles. Some muffs show quick chain stitch patterns, and "plain white satin elegantly tamboured" has been noted, but by George III's reign the muff lent itself especially to the kind of "dressing up" achieved with more bulky ornament. Thus a flower might be fashioned with petals shaped in the somewhat stiff coloured gauze known as aerophane, the leaves in chenille, the stems in colourful narrow ribbons, and only the flower centres actually "worked" in French knots. Amateur embroidery persisted but some mid-Victorian muffs bear painted decoration. Inevitably, in those compendium-minded days, some women delighted in a fashion with much to recommend it, the bag-muff chained and hasped.

Chapter Nineteen

PATTERNS AND THEIR SOURCES

OLD tools and techniques are endlessly fascinating to the craftsman. To the collector they are not only fascinating but important. Style and pattern, fabric and thread and stitch all are essential considerations to anyone seeking to "place" a piece of embroidery, historically or geographically. Home embroidery is a personal matter of taste and preference and singularly hard to date with rigid exactitude but one gradually becomes familiar with the essentials of period and usage. Individual idiosyncrasies are welcomed and instinctively distinguished from the deliberate quaintness of the modern imitation.

Pattern sources are intriguing but less revealing than one might hope. Fine interlacing patterns in gold braid and cord on dress, book cover and the like of Henry VIII's reign obviously derive from Celtic and Anglo-Saxon sources. But the earliest English pattern books now in existence indicate mainly Italian fashions. Indeed they are copied so assiduously from Italian books that many of their stiff, often geometrical outlines, designed mainly for cut work, lace and laces, bear little resemblance to most of the "typical" Elizabethan embroideries remaining today.

Pattern books for laces, suitable also for cross stitch and cut work, appeared near the beginning of the 16th century: P. Quentel published the earliest now in existence (Zwickau, 1525, and Cologne, 1527) which appeared in an English version in about 1530, concerning "... nedleworcke spannishe stitche and weavinge in the frame". Other Italian and German work followed, showing grotesques, figures, knots, leaves and so on, intended for counted thread embroideries in line work and cross stitch on linen and for

drawn work on net, and *La Clef de Champs* by the French painter Jacques le Loyne, published in London, 1586, with French, Latin, German and English titles.

The most notable pattern maker, however, was Frederic Vinciolo, whose *I singolari e nuovi Disegni* was published 1587 and 1588. Four years later John Wolfe duly printed the English "*New and Singular Patternes and Workes on Linnen Serving for Patterns to make all Sortes of Lace Edgings and Cut Workes: Newly invented for the Profite and Contentment of Ladies and Gentilwomen . . .*". This is interesting, perhaps, for its emphasis upon such embroideries as a genteel amateur enthusiasm. Similarly W. Barley in 1596 brought out an English version of G. Ciotti's work "*. . . Cut-workes, Raisde workes, Stitches and open Cut worke*". Prefatory verses include a reference to samplers. But after the mid-16th century the Continental obsession is with lace.

Among the more substantial embroideries that remain from Elizabethan England the familiar vigorous, sharply coiling stems bearing flowers and curious creatures still hark back to the older Celtic tradition; many others suggest the restrictions governing symmetrical repetitive patterns of woven fabrics, dominated by the rich "pine" and "pomegranate" pattern motifs that delighted 15th- and 16th-century Italy; while the "compartmented" patterns mentioned in the Northampton inventory, the "spots" of flower slips and the like, are more closely associated with the borders and fillings of illuminated MSS. and with the vigorous wood block illustrations in such works as Gerard's herbal, brought into common knowledge by the development of printed books. A few specimens remain of the late 16th- and early 17th-century embroidery on linen which has been printed for the purpose from engraved blocks.

Obviously bestiaries and such books as Geaner's *Historia Animalium* (1551-58) and Topsell's *Historie of four-footed beasts* (1606) and Thomas Moufet's *Insectorum* (1634: English edition 1658) were consulted too, and also such works as Geoffrey Whitney's *A choice of emblemes and other devices* (Leyden 1586) which is associated with some motifs on a bodice at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Elizabethan records refer to an astonishing array of subjects considered

suitable for ornament, from obelisks to frogs, from rain-bows to sea horses and whales, from spiders to artichokes, ostriches and dead trees. Flowers predominated, however: flowers were a constant source of use and pleasure to Elizabethan Englishmen, and this is reflected in Elizabethan embroidery, catering as it did for the many well-to-do newcomers to trade and commerce, successful farmers and prospering landowners.

Books offered illustrations, too, for Scriptural and mythological embroideries. Engravings suggested many ideas if not actual patterns: many came from the Continent, such as various works by Vos, for example, or Philippe Galle, and Collaert and J. de Stra. Yet other patterns were consciously or unconsciously heraldic—the tradition of the armorial bearings and badges that are among the earliest recorded secular embroideries, such as the old field bed of black and crimson velvet listed in the Northampton inventory of 1614 “imbrodred with white lions and the Staffordes knotte”.

An alternative for the embroiderer was to pay for an individual pattern designed to her requirements: in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries this was a common practice although references to the drawing of a piece of work must be viewed with caution if drawn thread work may be implied. “To John Hayes for drawing A Patrne for a qwyssion for the quene, 7s. 6d.” (1544). A development of this was the design ready printed on the fabric: it has been suggested that this was customary for 17th-century raised stump work where often a pattern is detailed to the last dot for every spangle, but the arguments against this theory are outlined in Chapter 13. Block-printed lining papers offered monochrome patterns in a very wide range of subjects, some formal, some floral, and including some late portraits.

A detail of early 17th-century patterns is the introduction of the unicorn, associated with James I's alteration in the supporters to the royal coat of arms. Rose and thistle in association are not to be expected earlier than his reign. Meanwhile, by the 17th century, more interesting pattern books were becoming available. Notable among these is R. Shorleyker's *A schole-house for the needle* . . . (1624).

ENGLISH DOMESTIC NEEDLEWORK

Even here some lace and cutwork patterns are from Vinciolo but the surface embroidery motifs "sundry sorts of spots, as Flowers, Birds, Fishes, &c" appear to be more or less original. In remaining copies the flowers and birds show most stains and pricks of use, but the fishes that had been acceptable in Elizabethan embroideries were important details in 17th-century raised work fountain pools. Some indication of this fashion for narrative incidents in difficult outdoor settings comes in another early 17th-century pattern book, *The Needle's Excellency*, by J. Boler. This had reached its tenth edition by 1634. The patterns were not new, but the book was favoured with an introductory poem by the established poet John Taylor (1580-1653) "The praise of the Needle". This gives a long list of the stitches then "in practise", including tent work and raised work, chain stitch, back stitch, cross stitch, and many others mostly now impossible to identify. But more interesting perhaps is Taylor's reference to the designs, indicating the importance placed upon those impossible backgrounds:

Flowers, Plants and Fishes
Beasts, Birds, Flyes and Bees,
Hills, Dales, Plains and Pastures
Skies, Seas, Rivers, Trees.

He was probably over-optimistic but at least indicates the range of men's interests and source of inspiration at that period when he claimed that the patterns had been gathered from Spain, Muscovie, Poland, Sweden:

Beyond the bounds of faithlesse *Mahomet*
From spacious China, and those kingdoms East,
And from great Mexico, the Indies West.

By 1661 Peter Stent of Giltspur Street, London, had issued his "therd book of flowers"—he was active between 1640 and 1662—and many patterns for flowers, fruits, beasts, birds and flies, for "birds sitting on sprigs" and for "branches". In an advertisement he refers also to notable houses such as Wanstead, Eltham and Theobalds and mentions that all his designs and pattern books were available in colours. He offered patterns in sheets and half-sheets: "K. Charles" in the offhand manner of the period's

blue dash earthenware, Scriptural figures such as "Abraham offering Isak" in response to the needs of raised stump work, and also the four Seasons, the five Senses, the four quarters of the world—all the figure subjects associated with the corners of caskets and mirror frames. Among other publications John Overton in 1674 published W. Hollar drawings that included beasts, flowers, fruits, "butterflies and other vermine". John Overton followed in Stent's wake, and such patterns appear in earlier editions by Stent. W. Simpson may be noted too as another mid-17th century engraver of "flowers, fruits, beasts, birds and flies exactly drawn".

The reigns of Charles II and James II, a period of plentiful, cheap designs, is marked by the most prolific output of pictorial embroidery panels. Some of the many embroidered heads in ovals may have been copied from wood block lining papers of the period. Before the end of the century the motifs for raised work were utterly outmoded but the delights of chinoiserie were being tasted to the full. Occasionally one finds a fascinating piece expressing the old ideas in the new manner. The cavalier and his lady may still form the centre of a design, for, say, a bed hanging and the familiar lion, stag and the like fill the corners, but in the manner of the William and Mary hangings the whole field is delicately patterned with curving, sinuous stems, flowers and leaves.

Chinoiserie lovers were served not only by embroidery patterns but by Stalker and Parker and others exploiting the new craze for japanning. If such patterns appear occasionally startling it may be interesting to compare them with other contemporaneous notions of ornament. The barges used by the city companies were gorgeously ornamental and in strikingly similar vein. Thus in 1719 the Ironmongers' Company had its barge redecorated "the battens greene rockwork and figures . . . pannels painted from figures Peace, Plenty, Charity, and Justice; in the front of the said doors a sea horse . . . round the outside ordinary pillars the King's, Citty's, and Company's armes, between each a lion's face hatched with gold 'with ornaments of shells and flowers . . .".

Eighteenth-century needlewomen were offered many patterns to tempt them from their idleness but the fact that persuasion was required indicates the change of attitude towards embroidery reflected in many of the half-hearted results. English flowers never lost their appeal to embroiderers and early 18th-century issues include those of the Kensington nurseryman Robert Furber whose massed groupings of flowers in vases such as *The Flower Garden Displayed* were boosted as "very Useful . . . for Painters, Carvers, Japanners, etc., also for the Ladies as Patterns for working . . .". These appeared in various versions between 1730 and 1760. They were rivalled by such publications as Heckell's *Select Collection . . . for the Improvement of Ladies in Drawing or Needlework* with the flowers arranged in baskets.

Mrs. R. E. Head has drawn attention to the distinctive fashions for baskets to be noted in embroideries in the 18th century, early and late. Embroidered baskets associated with George II's reign are mainly oval, with high sides sloping outwards at the top and bearing formal sprays of flowers. These are conspicuously different from the "Louis XVI" style of basket that became important in later George III embroideries, high handled, graceful, set off by trails of blossom. It may be noted that table baskets in porcelain and glass followed the same changes.

By the 18th century pattern drawing had become a trade, considered worthy of mention in *The London Tradesman*, 1747, the work being prepared either on paper or on "different sorts of linens with the Proper silks and crewels for making them". Such craftsmen, it asserts, require "a fruitful Fancy" and "a wild kind of imagination".

The course of embroidery patterns may be traced through the later 18th century in the supplements to the ladies' magazines that succeeded the brief *Ladies Mercury* launched as early as 1693. For instance *The Ladies Magazine* itself from 1770, and *The New Ladies' Magazine* from 1785, *The Fashionable Magazine* from 1786, and others, offered patterns for interesting and reasonably difficult embroideries such as a petticoat border in Italian quilting or flower sprigs for an apron or gown. *The Ladies Magazine* was responsible for some of the so-called map samplers dating to the 1770s,

suitable, it was suggested, for a firescreen or a framed wall ornament. Too often at that period, however, a pattern was recommended because "the executive part will be far from difficult". Embroidery pictures for lazy—or ill-taught—needlewomen offered painted faces and skies and left for stitchery only such details as gowns in showy satin stitch or long-and-short stitch, and woolly sheep in innumerable French knots.

The real needlewomen of the century, people like the many-talented Mrs. Delany, devised their own patterns. Other strenuous enthusiasts like Mrs. Knowles and Miss Linwood copied oil paintings, and others again who did not copy patterns on to their fabric or choose materials already printed or hand-tinted, might try to embroider in tiny black stitches over a paper print lightly attached to the fabric.

The major change in pattern development came only in the 19th century: then for the first time surface embroideries on canvas, worked out by counting the threads, were represented by patterns on squared paper, each square for a single stitch. Here at last the needlewoman could work straight from the squared paper without copying it on to the canvas and yet make an exact, stitch by stitch, reproduction. This was made possible because of technical advances in the manufacture of canvas. The results include pictures, cushions, firescreens and major upholsteries, dress details—the full range of 19th-century embroidery from chair cover to hair tidy, with a complete indifference to the relationship between design and material.

It should be stressed, perhaps, that the patterns were associated at first with work in fine silks and in beads. But now they are remembered mainly for their most strident phase, from the 1830s throughout the early years of Victoria's reign, when the double-thread canvas, woven specially for the purpose from about 1820, included a blue thread to indicate every five or ten stitches and these stitches were made in soft, gaudy merino Berlin wools.

The earliest blocked and coloured patterns on squared paper were published as early as 1804 by a Berlin print-seller but his invention passed almost unnoticed until in

1810 a needlewoman, Frau Wittich, saw their possibilities for cheap mass production. She and her print-seller husband then improved the quality of the designs and engaged competent artists to make squared copies of famous paintings. Some of the more intricate patterns cost as much as £50 each to prepare, print and hand-colour. Ackermann and other print sellers imported a few into England but the real development in this country came after 1830 when a Mr. Wilks of Regent Street imported large quantities of patterns together with the bright wools and finished examples from Berlin. By 1840 the leading publishing houses in London were employing more than 1,200 girls to colour such patterns, printed from copper plates.

Mrs. Lancaster advertising in the *New Guide to Tunbridge Wells*, 1840, offers "Berlin materials for Ladies' Needlework". Her list is interesting, the wools including English and Berlin embroidery wools, yarn, worsted and crewels as well as floss silk. She offers brown and white canvas and silk canvas in various colours (which would not require worked backgrounds) and Berlin paper patterns. The Countess of Wilton in 1844 declared that of the 14,000 Berlin patterns issued "all the best which have been produced latterly are copied from English and French prints". She deplored the way a good design was often marred by some adventitious frippery, instancing Landseer's famous "Bolton Abbey" painting "where the repose and beautiful effect of the picture is destroyed by the introduction of a bright sky and straggling bushes of lively green, just where the artist had thought it necessary to depict the stillness of the inner court of the Monastery, with its solemn grey walls, as a relief to the figures in the foreground". Mrs. Merrifield in 1851 was more forthright on "those libels on pictures executed in Berlin wool . . . caricatures of human nature".

Popular artists were copied mercilessly at this period and early Victorian romanticism fed with "Mary Queen of Scots and the Dying Douglas" or "The Earl of Leicester's Last Interview with Amy Robsart". Even cross stitch samplers were influenced and their trim matter-of-fact houses and gardens supplanted to some extent by castles and romantic landscapes. It is interesting to note the change

during the late 1840s from pale grounds to black for the wreaths of roses, and the parrots in settings of flowers and fruits and similar standard patterns, a change already witnessed in flower-ornamented papier mâché, influenced by one of the recurrent waves of enthusiasm for Chinese lacquers. Indeed when the flowers are not too florid the brilliant "japanned" effects are extremely attractive, with three or four shades of each main colour lightened with white and grey.

After the mid-century the work tended to deteriorate. Popular patterns for pictures and furniture included studies of the royal children, although even at the time some people doubted the suitability of using the young Prince of Wales as a footstool. Many Biblical subjects were issued to be worked as wall pictures, often as much as three feet by two feet, copied from painfully tiny but perfectly exact patterns. Other pictures were sentimental portraits and for furniture there were patterns of dogs, cats, parrots, nests of eggs, some to be sewn partly in relief and all worked out with a determination to achieve such correctly-shaded three-dimensional realism that they become painfully ill-suited to their use on chair seat or footstool, but are appealingly frivolous today.

Patterns were issued as late as the 1860s, but these tended to be more formalised and compact, in leaf designs or geometrical shapes. The harsh aniline dyes for wools date many pictures to at least as late as 1858 but late English patterns indicate a preference for browns and heavy greens lit with gleams of silk or bead work.

It is interesting to note in Mrs. Lancaster's 1840 advertisement mentioned above that she also offers braid and satin stitch paper patterns, as well as very many kinds of fringe, tassels, cords, bindings, gimps. The alternative patterns available for the 19th-century needlewoman tend to be forgotten. Couched braiding required scrolling arabesque designs. The satin stitch, in silks and metal thread, was then sometimes known as Breton work, patterned with flowers and formal shapes. Use of shamrock in patterns suggests an Irish 19th-century origin.

The Gothic revival prompted a re-discovery of old

embroideries but the traced patterns and materials issued by the Morris firm date to the last quarter of the century, characteristic work by Morris himself, his daughter, Miss Burne-Jones and such assistants as J. H. Dearle being mainly for darning stitches in floss silks. The "art needlework" of this experimental period, in revolt against appallingly raucous "fashion" prompted many patterns on crash linen and serge for deliberately irregular crewel stitches. In those prolific days patterns were available for every article that could possibly carry embroidery, from bell-pull to door porter figure, and many of these designs have considerable charm. Many screens and couch covers attractively reflect the passing Japanese mood in their love of herons and other water fowl, of flights of sparrow-like bamboo birds among bold, well-placed water plants, in colour schemes predominantly brown and grey, although the stitchery may make an honest needlewoman squirm.

Chapter Twenty

OLD EMBROIDERY TOOLS

THOSE who love old embroidery may find peculiar delight in the tools that created it, associating themselves with the work in progress as well as the results, sharing the bead-threader's struggle with wax and bristle, feeling the curve worked into the quilter's needle. Old embroidery equipment has the appeal of all well-used craft tools and the particular attraction of tools made dainty and ornamental, too, just to please a woman's eye. Even the squares and crosses and snowflakes of mother-of-pearl silk winders make a delectable small collection, fret-cut, engraved or deeply carved, and every one with a different tone and glint of pearl, as pleasing to the eye as to the fingers.

Needles and knitting needles, pins, bodkins, thimbles, scissors—all the familiar details of the workbox were known and used in Imperial Rome. From so long a history of appreciative demand enough old equipment remains today to gather into a fascinating collection. This may be assembled perhaps in one of the superb workboxes that I have written of before, possibly a raised work cabinet but more likely an early 19th century box or work table, of handsome material and splendid workmanship, perfect in every detail of fit and finish. Or a collector may discover the particular delight of *chatelaine* and *etui*.

That elegant elaboration of chains and hooks swinging from the waist and known as a *chatelaine*, or even more perfectly as an *equipage*, dates back to the girdle hangings of Roman and Saxon days. Every Tudor lady carried small treasures of needlecase, book, pomander, almost at hem level or looped up on her skirt on long gold chains from her waist, and the Stuart lady only added to her load, mentioned,

for example, in *The French Garden for English ladies and gentlewomen to Walk in* (1621): "Give me my girdle and see that all the furniture be at it: look if my cizers, the pincers, the pen knife, the knife to close letters, with the bodkin, the ear pickers and the seal be in the case." The list could as well have included pincushion, needlecase, thimble.

Some lovely 18th-century chatelaines remain. The big hook that attaches the equipage to the belt is masked by a shaped metal medallion richly ornamented, supporting the delicate chains that bear the small details of egg-shaped thimble case and the like, often dominated by a long, narrow cylinder for bodkin and stiletto or the flattish tapering etui shaped to contain a pair of scissors but often carrying snuff spoon, ivory memo tablet and other necessities. Some etuis served the drizzler as she snipped the gold "lace" from uniform or waistcoat and wound the metal thread on a tiny spool in an elegant hanging holder that also might have a hook for attaching to her belt.

The whole style of the chatelaine tends to gay rococo scrolls and flourishes, deeply embossed in gold or richly golden pinchbeck or cheaper gilt metal: some particularly colourful chatelaines with their matching etuis, thimble eggs and all are in Staffordshire painted enamels with flowers or tiny pastoral scenes in gilded rococo scrolls set against delicate pink or turquoise, dark blue, yellow or apple green backgrounds. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her "Town Eclogue" describes a fifty guinea equipage with Mars and Cupid upon the toothpick:

A myrtle foliage round the thimble case;
Jove, Jove himself does on the scissors shine . . .

The fashion for chatelaines continued long into Victoria's reign, in gilt metal, in gleaming cut steel with myriads of tiny glinting facets only less perfect than 18th-century originals, in pierced gold, in the plated and oxidised silvers of the second half of the century, in steel and jet towards the century's end.

There are, too, innumerable minor sets of embroidery tools. Often a thimble case is designed to hold needles and pins and perhaps a silk winder; occasionally the thimble

tops a powder shaker to keep the hands fresh and dry for metal embroidery.

An interesting list of sewing equipment appears in Randle Holme's *Academie of Armory* (heraldry) published 1688 but apparently written 1649. Here "The School mistris terms and things to work with" include "needles of several sizes, cruel of all colours, silk for sowing of all colours, a tent, a samcloth, a cloth to sew on, canvice cloth, Slave silk, Naples silk, fine white alcomy wyre, ising glass, gum arabic".

These are mostly self-explanatory. The tent is the embroidery frame required to hold the fabric taut when working tent stitch and other canvas stitches (Holme refers to tent stitch on the finger and in the tent and also on satin), for counted thread stitches, for embroidery with gold threads and other laid and couched work, for appliqué and quilting. Hogarth's painting "A Family Party" shows a typical rectangular frame on trestle legs, the sides adjustable to ensure a firm, even pull on the webbing that holds the embroidery fabric. "A pair of bellows and an old tent frame" were listed for 1s. 10d. among minor furnishings associated with the renowned lady bountiful Dame Mary Ramsey in 1590. Hardwick in 1601 had "nyne paire of beames for embroiderers".

Tambour work acquired its name from the circular frames that held the fabric. In a tambour frame two hoops fit inside each other with the fabric between them, a rim of cork or felt to the inner hoop, or a binding of ribbon, ensuring a firm grip. Joseph Cooper, turner, on his trade card of about 1760 advertised "crewel frames . . . with all manner of Ivory, Lignum and Tunbridge Wares . . .". Holme defines a samcloth as "vulgarly a sampler", and lists many stitches: it may be noted that stump work appears under its contemporaneous name of raised work but quilting is mentioned only among terms used by upholsterers.

Stone Age bone needles have been found, perhaps 14,000 years old, with eyes so fine as to suggest spun thread. Steel needles were brought to Europe by the Moors and were being made in Nuremburg by the middle of the 14th century. But steel wire needles were made in England as an innovation in 1545 by a native of India whose daughter

married an Englishman, Greening. Greening and his son established the trade in Buckinghamshire in 1560 and even then it was another hundred years before the manufacture was sufficiently developed for the Company of Needle-makers to be incorporated by Cromwell in 1656.

John Farbeck, Durham mercer, stocked 350 needles in 1597 but they were Spanish, valued at 3*s.* 10*d.* Needles were often listed by the clout but knitting needles or pricks were counted by the pound: Farbeck had 2½ lbs. valued at 2*s.* 1*d.*; Thomas Bowes of Newcastle in 1593 stocked 1½ lbs. at 2*s.* 6*d.* among his counters and courting rings, toufte buttons and hundredweights of starch. Twelve big-eyed crewel needles cost 3*d.* in 1629.

Meanwhile many boxes and cases had been devised to contain these essential tools. A tiny needlebook might hang from the Elizabethan girdle, covered with a sliding sheath case of ivory or stiffened embroidery to keep it closed, and later specimens found today may have panels of ivory mounted on ribbon, or be of soft leather suitably lined with flannel to be rolled up and tied.

Needle boxes appear in all manner of miniature extravagances. Some suggest the sloping knife boxes of the later 18th century, their compartments holding needles of different sizes and perhaps also a thimble, all beautifully cased in tortoiseshell or ivory. Small silver figures with hollow bodies have their counterpart in 18th-century porcelains. Plainly cylindrical needle boxes may be of ivory deeply carved—from Birmingham as well as from the Orient—or in Tunbridge ware mosaic that appealed to early Victorian needlewomen with its resemblance to cross stitch embroidery. Wooden needleboxes mounted with Baxter prints were so popular with early Victorians that these “printed oil paintings” were known as needle prints.

Thimbles and their cases, too, are delightful to collect. Romans used bronze, more sharply pointed than the shape today: Medieval Englishwomen might use leather stitched into thimble shape such as continued into recent use in remote regions of Ireland and may yet be sold as “Elizabethan”. Gold, silver and silver-gilt thimbles were made in England from the mid-16th century, with cone-shaped tips

and sometimes mottoes on their rims, a fashion associated also with the early 18th and the mid-19th centuries. Until the 18th century the metal was usually hand-raised into a deep domed cap with punched indentation and the lower portion was made separately, vertically seamed and almost invisibly joined to it. In some instances a gold or silver thimble was raised—hammered into shape from the flat metal—entirely in one piece. Relief ornament on the band came only in the 18th century.

A raised gold thimble cost 50s. in 1714. But the merchant who supplied the home needlewoman valued his thimbles at prices suggesting the plainest of leather, bronze or brass. James Backhouse of Kirby-in-Lonsdale, for instance, had fifty thimbles worth 16*d.* in 1578, and Farbeck of Durham listed 13½ dozen women's thimbles for 21*d.* in 1597. Bronze or pewter might be used for early thimbles but after 1600 nearly all were of brass. Until the end of the 17th century they were dome-shaped, very short and uncomfortably thick, being turned and bored from solid cast brass and then hand-punched all over with irregular indentations. Cast brass thimbles were made throughout the 18th century but by the 1790s, like other small brass ware, they were more cheaply and quickly stamped from rolled brass plate, indentations and all.

Gold and silver thimbles of the 18th century are sometimes very lovely. The band may be chased or engraved with flower wreaths or tiny scrolls around a cartouche containing crest or cypher. Some exquisite late 18th-century specimens include bands of intricate filigree soldered between cap and rim, and others are bordered with gems. The indentations could be impressed symmetrically after the development of the rose machine in about 1760.

Florid chasing in the early 19th century manner appeared even on silver thimbles, as did the mid-century craze for views of famous buildings and London landmarks, requiring very tall thimbles and even then filling much of the sides. The delightful thimbles in late 18th-century painted enamels have been mentioned already in their small egg-shaped cases. The fault of shallow, inadequate indentations in the slippery enamel was overcome when they were fitted

with caps of punched brass. They were made from about 1770 and are not to be confused with the bone china thimbles of the 1820s and onwards, glazed inside and out, indented only on their tops and painted with flower posies and bearing, but all too rarely, the marks of Minton or Royal Worcester.

Carved thimbles are especially collectable but hard to date—in ivory, jade, bone, gilt-banded mother of pearl, box-wood. Their delicacy may be matched by the superb workmanship of the toy trunks and caskets that complete their presentation status. Filigree thimble ornament may be matched on inch-long silver or silver-gilt casket; other trunks are covered with leather or the shagreen fashionable around the mid-18th century. Mother of pearl and bone cases date mostly from the 1820s onwards as alternatives to surfaces of tortoiseshell and ivory. Some screw-capped vase thimble holders in hardwood date to early Victorian days. Thimbles so obviously suggest the embroiderer's favourite acorn shape that a likely find is an acorn composed of thimble and emery bag, or an acorn-shaped thimble case—ivory, hardwood, or bead-encrusted.

Accompaniment to the thimble for plain sewing is the finger shield, a ring to slip over the first finger of the left hand with a broad oval to take the pricks of hemming. Emery bags for rubbing rust off needles are found in attractive shapes and of indefinable age. Heavy ones like pin-cushions might be used for pinning the end of a seam although for seam-holding various clamps were devised, screwing to the sewing table and often topped with pin-cushions. The most attractive is a bird topped with a spring-controlled beak, the early solid specimens being copied in Victorian days with hollow stamped metal variants.

Some collectors delight—understandably—in the various eggs sold as darning balls and used on occasion as hand coolers, of glass, ivory, silky-smooth turned wood and best of all the sparkling, shadowy, amethyst-and-honey spar marbles known as blue-john and mined only in Derbyshire. A bowlful of eggs in all sizes down to thrush-size for glove mending in blue-john makes an unforgettable sight. Some wooden darning eggs are hollow for holding wool, or for

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the eggs of wax that were also imperative in the old work-box for controlling and smoothing difficult floss silks and for preparing the threads when stringing beads. The Tunbridge ware men made wax holders in the striped wood combinations known as stickware, matching barrel or acorn-shaped stickware tape measures, and wax is found occasionally in holders of bone appropriately painted with flowers and beehives.

A few tools entirely at home in the workbox or casket are strictly not for needlework at all. Tambour work and crochet require their own very similar tools—crochet needing a rounder hook than the pointed outline used for tambour work—and such hooks find their place among many a matching set of scissors, stiletos, thimbles and needlecases. A particular favourite in the 18th and 19th centuries was the shuttle for thread knotting or tatting whether made of bone or of amber, tortoiseshell, pearl, rock crystal, ivory, wrought steel, or even gold. Artists as different as Reynolds and Nattier painted the Countess of Albemarle and Madame Adelaide of France exquisitely busy with their shuttles, and Sir Charles Sedley in 1707 turned a verse in praise of "The Royal Knotter":

... For here's a Queen now thanks to God!
Who when she rides in coach abroad
Is always knotting threads.

All manner of trimmings and tassels and fringes were variously knotted throughout much of the 17th and 18th centuries, however, when tedious journeys and long hours of poor candlelight created a need for more or less mechanical finger work—"knotted fringe or any other worke that may be done by candlelight with ease to the eyes", as Lettice Legh of Lyme wrote to her sister in 1690.

Tatting at least has lasted to the present day, still as a completely amateur pastime. By the first years of the 19th century the embroiderer with her living to earn was beginning to think in terms of machines rather than tools. A quilting machine was invented in 1790, a tambour machine in 1807, and by 1829 Switzerland had a many-needled embroidery machine that could produce *broderie Anglaise*.

Yet the home embroiderer has remained undaunted. She has seldom sought to rival the professional. It is perhaps significant that when the Broderers' Company acquired a coat of arms the tools of their trade represented upon it consisted not of thimble and needle and fine-pointed scissors but of *two trundles or* and *two broches in saltier*. The trundle is the embroiderer's quill of gold thread but the broche is a tool for piercing, so forgotten today that it has to be sought among old references to silk or satin broched or surface-ornamented with gold, or traced in the word brochure which should consist of papers joined together by piercing and sewing but is almost invariably misapplied. The terms and tools of home embroidery show little likelihood of such abandonment.

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